









# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

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# THESIS

A RACE FOR MARTYRDOM:  
THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS CORPS  
(IRGC)

by

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A Race for Martyrdom:  
The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)

by

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requirements for the degree of

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## ABSTRACT

The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) is often referred to in Western press but still, little is known about these uniformed zealots. This thesis is an attempt to show that the IRGC is not a haphazard army but one that is striving to organize while, at the same time, attempting to deal with Iran's internal security, as well as external threats.

Ayatollah Khomeini's death is certain to bring about the eruption of further violence in Iran. The importance of the revolutionary guards should not be underestimated in the ensuing power struggle, since the Corps may eventually provide future leadership for Iran.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. BACKGROUND

Iran's population mounted a true people's revolution when life under the Shah began to sour, as he monopolized the state's power in secular hands and excluded the religious leadership from a voice in the government. Due in part to the Shah's repressive policies, the intellectuals were driven underground and began to use the religious mosque network as a means of communication in their struggle against the regime. This was the avenue to the people that was the least susceptible to blockage by the central government.<sup>1</sup>

Late in 1978, a general consensus had developed that the extremism of the Shah's regime must be ended and parties from all points of the political spectrum joined together to bring about the demise of the Pahlavi Dynasty. The Shah's departure from Iran on January 16, 1979, signalled their victory. However, the power that had once been concentrated in the hands of a few secular leaders was once again controlled by a minority, this time the religious fundamentalists.<sup>2</sup>

In the wake of his departure, the Shah left Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar to tend to his crumbling government. A key factor in the ensuing power struggle between the Prime Minister and the revolutionary movement was the armed forces. At first,



the army backed Bakhtiar's government, and in a show of support at Lavizan barracks, home of the Imperial Guard, more than 1,000 troops at morning prayer called on Allah to "keep us alive to the last breath to fight for the Shah."<sup>3</sup> On his return to Iran after a 15 year exile, Ayatollah Khomeini spoke of the new government in these terms: "The United States and Britain have ordered the Army to keep Bakhtiar in power." He gave thanks to the Air Force which had given stronger indications than the other two services of joining the revolution in large numbers. He encouraged the army to follow that example and stated: "We want a very powerful Army but not one which is trained by Americans and carries out orders of U.S. military advisors."<sup>4</sup>

Upon his return to Iran on February 1, 1979, Khomeini announced Mehdi Bazargan, a member of the Iran Freedom Party, as the provisional Prime Minister for the proposed Islamic Republic. The military, however, provided a show of force, which was a reminder to all that Bakhtiar was still Prime Minister and had the support of the military. But the pendulum of power was swinging rapidly to the side of the revolutionaries. On February 11, 1979, in the face of mounting opposition, Bakhtiar resigned and the army command, which could have played a pivotal role in subsequent events, declared its neutrality by ordering its men back to their barracks. This move left Bakhtiar stripped of what little authority he might have been able to retain. Once the





military withdrew, important government offices fell to the revolutionaries. In the violence that followed, Imperial Guards still loyal to the Shah, turned on Air Force personnel at Dowshan Air Base who had defected to the Khomeini side. Tipping the balance in favor of the revolutionaries in the battle that followed were two underground organizations, the Muslim Mujahidin-e Khalq and the communist Fedayeen-e Khalq.<sup>5</sup>

## B. THE BAZARGAN GOVERNMENT

The immediate concern of the Bazargan government was to restore law and order throughout Iran and this entailed calling for the surrender of thousands of weapons which had been "liberated" from government arsenals in the frenzy of the revolution. Of greater concern to the effectiveness of the fledgling government, was the shadowy Revolutionary Council and the activities of the komitehs (Islamic revolutionary committees), whose armed members acted as marauding vigilantes after the revolution. In Tehran alone, there were 14 komitehs, each with its own militia, operating out of mosques and controlled by the Central Komiteh. Despite a pledge by the Bazargan government that there would be no more firing squads, the komitehs continued to order the executions of numerous officials and military men from the Shah's regime. Finally, in April 1979, Prime Minister Bazargan was able to assert the authority of his Provisional Government by



announcing the komitehs would be purged and 4,000 of their militiamen would be merged into a national police force. This was viewed as a victory for the Provisional Government in its attempts to consolidate its power against the disruptive elements of the komitehs and abuses by their militiamen.<sup>6</sup>

This near-dictatorial rule by the komitehs, which, according to Bazargan, were turning "day into night," caused the Prime Minister to offer his resignation to the Ayatollah in March 1979. Although Khomeini rejected it and expressed his full confidence in the Prime Minister, the secret Revolutionary Council continued to function as a parallel government. It was aided by armed detachments of revolutionary guards, which, the Council admitted, were "not completely under the control of the Revolutionary Council." Bazargan and his supporters wanted the revolutionary guards, and the komitehs that controlled them, dissolved and the job of law enforcement given back to the regular police. Showing its support for the Provisional Government, the Mujahidin-e Khalq urged that all power in Iran be given to the Prime Minister. The organization issued a statement urging that "No other authority should have the power to interfere in the Government's affairs." Aware that this could cause a potential rift, Ayatollah Khomeini stated: "We must join hands against those who sow the seeds of discord and want to drive us back to the previous situation."<sup>7</sup> But, in



spite of this appeal for unity, power centers continued to multiply in the absence of a hierarchy under the Ayatollah. The komitehs, clergy, the army, and even the Council of Experts, appointed to draft the new Constitution, developed their own power centers as an even larger division developed between the religious establishment and the secular opposition.<sup>8</sup>

### C. THE RISE OF THE FUNDAMENTALISTS

The downfall of Mehdi Bazargan's Provisional Revolutionary Government came in the wake of the seizure of the American Embassy by militant students on November 4, 1979. Upon the acceptance of Bazargan's resignation, Ayatollah Khomeini appointed the still secret Revolutionary Council to take charge of the government, thus representing a shift in power from the secular intellectuals to the fundamentalist clergy. The Council was called upon to arrange a constitutional referendum, the election of a constituent assembly and the appointment of a president. Said Khomeini, "I charge you to perform these duties, particularly those relating to the cleansing of the government and the welfare of the poor and the homeless in a completely revolutionary and decisive manner."<sup>9</sup>

The clergy obtained an even tighter grip on Iran when the Assembly of Experts put the finishing touches on the proposed Constitution. Controlled by Ayatollahs Montazeri and Beheshti, the Assembly introduced a new office into the





Iranian government, that of Vilayat-e Faqih, or religious guardian, which was a position tailor-made for Ayatollah Khomeini, although his name was not mentioned. The religious guardian would have veto power over everything in the country, act as the supreme authority over the armed forces, and be more powerful than even the president of the Republic.<sup>10</sup>

However, not all of the clergy were in favor of these measures. In Shi'ite Islam, there is a small council of grand ayatollahs, each with his own following. Although he was not the most senior of the religious men, Ayatollah Khomeini was catapulted to the head of the six-man council of grand ayatollahs by his unquestioned popularity. Of great concern to some in the council were the strong arm tactics used by Ayatollahs Beheshti and Montazeri, both proteges of Khomeini, to assume power in the Islamic government. This only served to heighten the existing feud between Khomeini and some of the grand ayatollahs over the extent to which the clergy should become involved in the governing of the country. Ayatollah Shariat-Madari, the grand ayatollah for Iran's 13 million Azerbaijani Turks, opposed basing the Constitution on the religious guardian. Ayatollah Khoi, the keeper of the holy shrine in Najaf, Iraq, and the two Ayatollahs of Mashhad, Iran, were alarmed over the purges and brutalities committed by the fundamentalists. In fact, violence erupted when followers of the two Mashhad ayatollahs clashed with





revolutionary guards and fighting also broke out in Azerbaijan when pro-Shariat-Madari followers protested the Islamic Constituion.<sup>11</sup>

#### D. BANI-SADR'S PRESIDENCY

In January 1980, after Ayatollah Khomeini "advised" the clergy not to run for presidential office, thus dashing Ayatollah Beheshti's hopes, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr was elected with 75 percent of the popular vote. At the time of his electoral victory, it appeared that there had been a successful bridge between a modern democratic state and the fundamentalist Islamic community. But, in fact, there was to be no compromise between the two. A mixture of Islam and nationalism would not be tolerated according to the Ayatollah who said, "We want Islam, we do not want anything but Islam." Supporters of the new president hoped that his election would curb the excesses of the revolution and that he would reduce the power of the clergy, the Revolutionary Council, the revolutionary guards, and the courts.<sup>12</sup>

Bani-Sadr was immediately thrust into conflict with Ayatollah Beheshti and his clergy dominated Islamic Republican Party (IRP) over the U.S. hostage issue. Prior to the presidential election, Ayatollah Khomeini had given see-saw support first to his Prime Minister and then to the militant students holding the hostages by insisting there could be no compromise or negotiation. Bani-Sadr, on the other hand, condemned the



Students following the Imam's Line as trying to act as a parallel government and also spoke against their use of force.

Once Bani-Sadr was elected, Khomeini appealed to the populace to support the new president. The Ayatollah showed his backing for the new government by granting Bani-Sadr increased powers in dealing with the militant students. He was elevated to the position of leader with executive powers over the country's affairs from his office as head of the Revolutionary Council. This move was an attempt by the President to suppress the growth of independent power centers, such as the militant students. Calling the students "plotters," Bani-Sadr, in his new capacity as chairman of the Revolutionary Council, barred them from automatic access to radio and television, insisting that they rely instead on the nation's judicial process.<sup>13</sup>

A blow was dealt, not only to a quick solution to the hostage issue, but also to Bani-Sadr's attempts at national unity, when Ayatollah Beheshti, speaking for Khomeini, announced that the fate of the hostages would be decided by the Majlis (Parliament), whose election was still 10 weeks away. This was in line with Beheshti's attempts to reduce the new President's power and cause him to be nothing more than a figurehead. This decision signalled the setback for Bani-Sadr, who had wanted to transfer the hostages to government control, and a victory for the fundamentalists, who were backing the militants.<sup>14</sup>



The rift became greater when the IRP, which was demanding spy trials for the U.S. hostages, won control in the Majlis. Bani-Sadr was hesitant to proceed with such trials, as he felt that Iran should be satisfied with an apology from the United States for its former policies. Fearing further division, Khomeini warned that the country was in a state of "chaos" and that the President and the IRP should resolve their differences over the hostage issue and the selection of a new Prime Minister, the next bone of contention in the continuing power struggle.<sup>15</sup>

The IRP itself was not without its internal conflicts but common causes such as its opposition to U.S. imperialism, the struggle against the Shah, and loyalty to Khomeini enabled it to form a formidable block against opposition that arose. The IRP also used revolutionary guards, the hizbollahis (street mobs), and the komitehs to increase its political base. Although the Islamic Republican Party denied that the hizbollahis were a part of its activities, the street mobs consistently received the support of the pasdars (revolutionary guards), who were undeniably associated with the IRP as a whole. When hizbollahi mobs attacked the headquarters of the IRP's political opponents, the areas which were captured were turned over to the IRGC, which, in some cases, did not return them to their original owners. This happened in the takeover of the National Front offices and in the "cleansing" campaigns against Mujahidin





offices, homes and rallies. They were attacked jointly by hizbollahis and pasdars and fighting became so intense, that Bani-Sadr ordered round-the-clock protection on the home of a well-known Mujahidin family.<sup>16</sup>

The President also tried to rein in the IRGC after his appointment by Khomeini as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Because they were not as well trained, less heavily armed and not as disciplined as the regular army, the Pasdaran posed more of a potential political threat, due to their revolutionary cohesion. In his capacity as Commander-in-Chief, Bani-Sadr called on the IRGC to remain out of the political power struggle. This was difficult since the fundamentalists were attempting to neutralize the army and cement their control over the IRGC.<sup>17</sup> In one plot to undermine the President's authority, a member of the Central Committee of the IRP, Hassan Ayat, was quoted in a taped conversation as planning to force Bani-Sadr's resignation by political means or by force, if necessary. If need be, he suggested that the fundamentalists start training an "army of 20 million" under the cover of the Revolutionary Guards Corps.<sup>18</sup>

In an attempt to boost support for the moderate President, the Khomeini family opened an all-out campaign to help consolidate Bani-Sadr's authority. The Ayatollah publically condemned the street violence that had provided Ayatollah Beheshti with ammunition for his fight against Bani-Sadr's





power struggle. Khomeini's son and son-in-law ridiculed the street mobs and warned that Iran must begin to seek long range stability. Said his son-in-law, "God is with Bani-Sadr. One must confirm him... those who wish to crush Bani-Sadr and his like must know that society will crush them." Although this was the strongest support the President had received thus far, the Ayatollah did not provide sufficient backing throughout Bani-Sadr's presidency and preferred, instead, to stay aloof from the power struggle, intervening only on rare occasions. Because of this, Bani-Sadr was unable to convert his landslide presidential victory into real political power.<sup>19</sup>

#### E. BANI-SADR'S DECLINE

The power struggle between Bani-Sadr and the fundamentalists came to a head over the choice of a new Prime Minister. Although, according to the Constitution, Iran's President was next in rank to Ayatollah Khomeini, in fact, Bani-Sadr could do very little without the approval of the Majlis, in which the IRP had won a majority of the seats. Earlier, before the Majlis was scheduled to be inaugurated on May 28, the President had tried to appoint a new Prime Minister but those nominated turned down the position or were vetoed by the IRP hard-liners in the Revolutionary Council. The former Navy chief and presidential hopeful, Rear Admiral Ahmad Madani, rejected the offer after asking for a reduced role of the clergy in the government administration, something Bani-Sadr could not accomplish.



Others were reluctant to accept the job since the new Prime Minister would have to resign only weeks after accepting his position and be forced to seek two separate votes from the new parliament in order to be reinstated in the office.<sup>20</sup>

In a last ditch effort to avoid appointing a nominee from the IRP, Bani-Sadr wrote a note to Khomeini in which he said that the Ayatollah's son, Admad, was best qualified to become Prime Minister. Khomeini's reply was to the point, "My son Ahmad is a servant of the nation and can best serve the nation if he is free."<sup>21</sup>

A further blow to the confidence of Bani-Sadr's government was the election of a fundamentalist hard-liner, Hojatollislam Hashemi Rafsanjani, as Speaker of the Majlis by a healthy majority of 146 out of 196 members presiding. In addition, another fundamentalist, Muhammad Ali Rajai, was selected as Prime Minister. Also, most of the ministries were either controlled by the clergy's IRP or, in the instances where Bani-Sadr's supporters were in figure-head positions, they were attacked by the fundamentalists from within their own ministries. Over a month's time, four political parties were forced to close their offices and the nationalists and communists were forced to take their struggle underground. The IRP became the one party able to function openly and there was little chance that Bani-Sadr could have reversed this trend.



As Ayatollah Khomeini's health improved in mid-1980, he began to criticize the moderate government saying nothing had changed and the same bureaucrats who had misruled Iran during the Shah's time were continuing to work for the new government. He insisted that education be made Islamic and placed an emphasis on the "revolutionary institutions of government." The fact that the Ayatollah continuously wavered back and forth between his support for the clergy and the President, had the effect of backing the clergy.<sup>22</sup> The Ayatollah's unhappiness with Bani-Sadr increased when the President sent a letter to Khomeini calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Rajai's government. He also stated, "The presence of the current government is more disasterous than a war," and he complained that the Ayatollah had disregarded his warnings. He emphasized that instead of being able to solve the hostage issue "from a strong position, we will have to solve it from a weak position and one of surrender." He also drew a comparison between Britain under Neville Chamberlain and Rajai's government and claimed that the present government was waging a war of attrition against his presidency. He went on to accuse the fundamentalists of being responsible for weakening the armed forces which he had hoped to strengthen. He appealed to Khomeini for a free hand in dealing with the armed forces since he felt they must follow a "unified command." Bani-Sadr stated, "If I have not done anything else, at least I have taken the





disorganized military, one that was disappointed and full of chaos... and today am fighting with them on all fronts."

Since the outbreak of the Gulf War in September 1980, Khomeini had entrusted Bani-Sadr with the conduct of the war, which had increased his popularity. This letter was leaked to the press and only served to escalate the already existing tensions.<sup>23</sup>

After the publication of the letter it appeared that Khomeini had taken some of the President's words to heart when he announced on November 6, 1980, that "Those who do not profess military knowledge must not interfere in military affairs. It is like a colonel coming to us and wanting to tell us what the Islamic regulations are." Foreign correspondents to the war fronts were able to obtain confirmation from officers that the influence of the clergy had been reduced and that coordination between the army and the IRGC and improved. However, this backing of the President was short-lived, when on November 19, Bani-Sadr bitterly attacked his fundamentalist opponents in a speech and gave the IRP a renewed opportunity to continue its campaign against his moderate government.<sup>24</sup>

The outbreak of the Iran/Iraq war offered the fundamentalists more ammunition in their fight against the moderates. The early war effort served to invigorate the religious influence when the army crumbled under surprise Iraqi attacks and the only effective resistance came from the revolutionary guards and the militia. Future army successes were seen





as a minimum to save it from complete disgrace.<sup>25</sup> After his appointment as Commander-in-Chief, Bani-Sadr grasped at this "new lease on political life" and began building links with the military and spending a great deal of time on the war fronts. After a July 1980 attempted military coup, the army was heavily purged, allowing the clergy-backed revolutionary guards to assume key military commands. During the third week in July, the army command announced that 100 soldiers a day would be purged, thus putting a sizable dent in Bani-Sadr's popularity base.<sup>26</sup> This, coupled with legislation calling for equipping the revolutionary guards with heavy weapons and giving the Corps the pick of draftees, gave the IRP the edge in the political struggle. The fundamentalists began attacking the President publically in the Friday prayer sessions, when Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, a proposed successor to Khomeini, demanded to know why the army had not gone on the offensive in the war with Iraq.<sup>27</sup> Bani-Sadr had sided with the army and defended it as "a victim of revolutionary fervor," thus tying his fate with that of the army's. His plan to bring back officers who had formerly served the Shah only helped to weaken his revolutionary position. The idea that "ability is more important than loyalty" was a source of deep concern to the revolutionary and religious leaders who could foresee a victorious but disloyal army as eventually turning against the revolution.<sup>28</sup>



## F. THE END OF BANI-SADR

The fundamentalists became bolder in their attacks against the President and called for his dismissal when he was accused of acting unconstitutionally after his supporters used force in a March 6, 1981 presidential rally in Tehran. This use of violent tactics lost Bani-Sadr the advantage he had once held against the radicals. Stripped of his title of Commander-in-Chief by the Ayatollah in early June, the President was faced with the prospect of a trial for "defying" Khomeini's orders and refusing to sign bills passed by the Majlis, a violation of the Constitution. A short time later, on 22 June 1981, Bani-Sadr stepped down as the first President of the Islamic Republic and, branded as a "counterrevolutionary" by his former mentor, Ayatollah Khomeini, went into hiding. From there, the former President accused the clergy of meddling in military affairs and weakening the war effort by conspiring against him. He urged the military to continue to fight against Iraq without allowing "traitorous hands to stab you in the back." Eventually, he escaped to Paris with Massoud Rajavi, the leader of the Mujahidin-e Khalq, and formed a National Council of Resistance with the Kurds and other ethnic minorities opposed to the regime.<sup>29</sup>

The country was now firmly in the hands of the fundamentalists but their control was not to go unchallenged. The Mujahidin-e Khalq began a reign of terror in which countless IRP members, including the head of the party, Ayatollah



Beheshti, were killed. In spite of the opposition, the clergy's candidate for President, Hojatolislam Ali Khamenei, was successful in the October 2, 1981 elections, winning 95 percent of the vote. Unlike his predecessor, Khamenei was not granted the power of Commander-in-Chief and, instead, that position was delegated to the head of the Joint Staff, General Qassem Ali Zahirnejad.<sup>30</sup>

#### G. THOUGHTS ON IRAN'S FUTURE

"If Khomeini were to die tomorrow, Iran would split apart. It would be the next Lebanon." Former President Bani-Sadr<sup>31</sup>

Ayatollah Khomeini has been the cohesive force keeping the Islamic Republic together since its inception and with his death, the monopoly enjoyed so far by the fundamentalists will most likely end. Because of Khomeini's sanction, the IRP has managed to maintain its authority, and his continued blessing of the fundamentalist party, for the time being, secures their popularity with the lower classes. It will be difficult to ensure this popularity once he is gone.<sup>32</sup>

The IRP itself is split between the Maktabi and the Hodjatieh clerics and when Khomeini dies the power struggle between these two groups is certain to surface. Underground organizations, such as the Mujahidin-e Khalq, will be anxious to do battle with their enemies, the fundamentalists, and the Kurds and other ethnic minorities will press harder in their struggle for autonomy. The civil war which is likely to ensue will leave a power vacuum that must be filled quickly





by a person or persons with an organized, powerful, backing. The army, which would have been the most probable candidate to do this, is split by ethnic factions and weakened by numerous purges. Since the April 1980 attempt by the United States to rescue the hostages, suspicions about the loyalty of the military have bounded out of proportion.<sup>33</sup> The one cohesive force that could emerge victorious from a civil war is the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. Over the last three years, it has evolved from a ragtag force of glorified body guards and policemen into an organized and highly motivated army. It is not inconceivable that an Iranian Cromwell or Bonaparte could rise from the ranks of the revolutionary guards and take up the position of leader in the midst of the chaos which is highly probable at Khomeini's death. Western writers have tended to gloss over the importance of the IRGC, preferring, instead, to offer the army as the answer to fill any future power vacuum. The revolutionary guards have been dismissed as crazed zealots or cannon fodder provided by the religious fundamentalists. This is an attempt to shed light on this often ignored organization from whose ranks might one day come a future leader of Iran.





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## II. ORGANIZATION OF THE IRGC

### A. ORIGINS OF THE CORPS

"The aim of the Revolution Guard Corps is to protect and preserve the Islamic Revolution. Unlike the army and the various military and regular forces in the world, whose aim is to preserve states, national soil and sovereignty, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps is in charge of safeguarding the Revolution and its gains."<sup>1</sup>

-Mohsen Reza'i, Commander  
IRGC

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) traces its origins to the local Islamic komitehs (committees), each with its own militia, which sprang up throughout Iran during the revolution and faced the Shah's regime in a final "showdown." The collapse of the Shah's government and Prime Minister Bakhtiar's subsequent resignation on 11 February 1979, did not bring an end to Iran's violence and chaos. Thousands of gun-toting revolutionaries took to the streets and, in an attempt to bring about some semblance of order, the Revolutionary Government announced that only those deemed "mentally and physically suitable" would be allowed to carry weapons. On 14 February, Ayatollah Khomeini called for the surrender of an estimated 300,000 guns which had been "liberated" from army and police arsenals during the revolution, and he also warned that keeping the guns were forbidden under Islam.<sup>2</sup>

In order to bring about relative calm in Tehran, armed volunteers, paying for their equipment and using their own



cars, took to patrolling the streets and setting up roadblocks in order to perform searches and seizures. They were issued identity cards by a committee in each of the mosques and any items which they confiscated were turned over to the mosque.<sup>3</sup> Dressed in haphazard uniforms and brandishing high-powered weapons, these ardent followers of the Ayatollah provided the only government that most people saw on a daily basis. Termed an "irregular" militia, they executed several general officers condemned to death, directed traffic, and guarded military bases and homes of the "criminals of the former regime." Threatening to resign, Prime Minister Bazargan stated, "They persecute people, they arrest people, they issue orders, they oppose us, they are against our appointment."<sup>4</sup>

#### B. THE KOMITEHS

In the aftermath of the revolution, a typical komiteh passed sentences at secret trials and determined the time of death for those found guilty, set up rehabilitation programs for prostitutes, banned all alcohol, and ordered all liquor stores destroyed. Operating out of local mosques, the komitehs were described as "the Justice Ministry, the law court, the police and gendarmerie-anything you can imagine."<sup>5</sup> The committees in the provinces received their orders from the Central Committee in Tehran, which acted as the executive arm of the Revolutionary Council. The komiteh of Abadan, for instance, was typical of most committees and was composed of 13 members (bazaar merchants, teachers and local clergy) and was headed by an ayatollah.<sup>6</sup>





One komiteh, named the "Khomeini" Committee, conducted property surveys of those people connected with the former regime. Property was seized by order of the committee, and once inventoried, would be returned only if it could be proven that the items were not acquired illegally or by "non-Islamic" means. Ayatollah Khomeini declared that the property would be confiscated for the benefit of the "dispossessed classes." These inventory operations took place at night and were carried out by inventory commando groups, consisting of 7 to 9 members, including a photographer.<sup>7</sup>

The komitehs became so powerful and their attacks on the populace so plentiful, that the Chief Prosecutor of the Islamic Revolutionary Courts placed a ban on local revolutionaries, who were acting under the direction of the komitehs, from entering private homes without special authorization. In fact, the local komitehs were also required to obtain special permission from the Chief Prosecutor's office before allowing their members to conduct raids on homes. In addition, the Interior Ministry called on the people to inform the revolutionary committees of anyone who "imposed" on them.<sup>8</sup>

The National Front, the largest political party in Iran prior to the revolution, called for a creation of a National Guard and for measures to bring the committees under state control. It was hoped that the creation of a National Guard would overcome the problem of whether or not the Iranian army had been properly purged of supporters of the Shah. It also



came as a result of bandits terrorizing roads in the provinces and Tehran, and the lack of cohesion between the revolutionary forces.<sup>9</sup> Elements of the Mujahidin and the Fedayeen also brought pressure on the Bazargan government to replace the security forces of the old regime with a "spirited" guardian corps.<sup>10</sup>

Mohammad Riza Mahdavi-Kani was appointed Director of all of the komitehs in an attempt at centralizing control over the activities of the committees throughout the country and this position was attached to the Prime Minister's office. In March 1979, Deputy Prime Minister Entezam stated, "These committees have taken the law into their hands and were undermining the authority of the provisional government and damaging the revolutionary spirit." He went on to say that an Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps or Pasdaran (guardians) would be set up as a "temporary" measure until the police and the gendarmerie were able to take over those functions again.<sup>11</sup> The Ayatollah also ordered a sharp reduction in the activities of his armed followers who had already assumed the roles of both police force and militia after the revolution. In addition, in a move that could be interpreted as an attempt to dilute the power of these armed followers, it was decided to form two government sponsored units. One would be a temporary auxiliary police force, known as the Revolutionary Watchmen who would serve as police until regular units returned, and the second unit would be a permanent auxiliary to the army.<sup>12</sup>



### C. A SEPARATE ENTITY

Ayatollah Khomeini issued an order for the establishment of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and it was approved by the Revolutionary Council on 22 April 1979.<sup>13</sup> He called for the formation of a special armed force which would "protect the Islamic Revolution" and be responsible only to the Revolutionary Council. Now, the Pasdarans, instead of being integrated into the police force and army as originally planned, were to become a separate entity. This action was prompted by the assassinations of Ayatollah Morteza Motahari, the supposed Chairman of the Revolutionary Council, and General Mohammad Vali Oarani, a former Chief of Staff. The revolutionary guards were to be a "different, independent military force," whose allegiance would be to the Islamic fundamentalists and not the provisional government, thereby increasing the tension between the parallel governments. Later, President Bani-Sadr, just a few days prior to his exile, would describe the Corps in the following manner:

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the revolution guards corps should as a matter of principle take upon itself the tasks of consolidating, organizing and mobilizing the masses for the implementation of the public duty. According to this assumption, the corps will be an armed organization possessing revolutionary criteria, and the revolutionary awareness and maturity of its members will be the basic condition for accepting the responsibility of acting as a guard. Those who meet these conditions will, through their awareness of (the responsibility attached to) carrying and using arms, join this armed, revolutionary organization.





In my view, a revolution guard is a popular and revolutionary individual who, while possessing power, is nevertheless in possession of Islamic magnanimity; he regulates his relations with the subjects of the Islamic Republic, even those who might be opposed to him politically, on the basis of Islamic mercy and kindness, although he acts steadfastly and decisively against the aggressive enemy. The Islamic revolution guards should be composed of those believers who embody the Koranic verse: They are harsh toward the infidels but merciful among themselves."<sup>14</sup>

The duties of the proposed 6,000 man force were to include helping with internal security, defending the country from attack and infiltration, aiding the revolutionary courts, and exporting the Islamic Revolution.<sup>15</sup> The constitution of the IRGC consisted of the following 4 articles:

1. Aim

a. To safeguard the Islamic Revolution, expand it based on the ideology of Islam, and carry out the demands of the Islamic Republic.

2. Duties

- a. Defending the country against attacks and occupation.
- b. Cooperating with the government in security issues, arresting counterrevolutionaries and other armed movements that are against the Islamic Republic.

3. Formation

a. The composition of the IRGC will be based on the principle of "non-concentration" and preserving the Central Command. The general principles and policy of the IRGC are determined by the Central Command with the approval of the Coordination Council.

4. Members

a. Volunteers for the IRGC must have the following qualifications:

- 1. Belief in Islamic ideology.
- 2. Faith in the Islamic nature of the Revolution and the Islamic Republic.





3. Possessing bravery, spiritual valor, as well as physical and mental power.

4. Taking a stand against Eastern and Western imperialism, Zionism, racism, and dictatorship.<sup>16</sup>

Prime Minister Bazargan fought the establishment of the Corps and tried to prevent its expansion. He hesitated in allocating funds to the guardsmen, thereby attempting to cut the flow of arms and ammunition to the Corps.<sup>17</sup> At first, it appeared that the Prime Minister would be successful in his campaign against the guards when it was announced that the Islamic "vigilantes" would be purged of some 4,000 members.<sup>18</sup> But Bazargan's request to the Ayatollah to dilute the authority of the IRGC and to obtain more power over the Pasdarans met stiff resistance in the Revolutionary Council and the Prime Minister was forced to concede that the militia was "here to stay." He conceded the necessity for the Corps by stating, "This country needs the Pasdarans more than any other time. When the Imam (Khomeini) gave me the mission of leading the government, I did not appreciate this need. I thought the old regime was gone and the new regime had replaced it. But later we saw this was not the case."<sup>19</sup>

Later, in February 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini gave President Bani-Sadr the supreme command over the armed forces in a move to strengthen his authority and end the power dispersion in the country. Making him head of the military, Khomeini stated, "At this sensitive stage, when we need centralization of power more than at any other stage, you, as my representative,



are appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces as defined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic." In addition, the Ayatollah urged Bani-Sadr to reconstitute the military along Islamic lines. As Commander-in-Chief, under Article 110 of the Constitution, Bani-Sadr now had the right to declare war and make peace, nominate the National Defense Council and appoint the Chiefs of Staff and the IRGC Commander.<sup>20</sup>

Armed with this authority, Bani-Sadr attempted to rein in the revolutionary guards, which, by June 1980, had grown to a force of some 30,000, far and above the original expectations of 6,000. But the President's plan proved more difficult than anticipated. The IRGC had no clear operational chain of command which was complicated by the emergence of what appeared to be two branches of the Pasdaran. One branch, or the "Central" Corps, was nominally under the control of the ineffectual central government, while the other carried out orders of the committees. An aide of Bani-Sadr's commented that there had been complaints about some of the guardsmen and in Kurdistan 50 pasdars were "dissolved" when they "had beaten up people and slandered and imprisoned in ways reminiscent of SAVAK." In the Central Corps "every bullet is accounted for, but in the committees, things are different." However, excesses were noted in the center as well. In June 1980, guardsmen opened fire after a fundamentalist mob attacked leftist militants, alarming both the President and the Ayatollah, but drawing praise from the IRP leader, Ayatollah Beheshti. On June 16, "Pasdar Day,"



Khomeini addressed thousands of guardsmen, stressing that all military personnel must answer to the President. He stated, "The committees will remain as long as they are needed" but would be purged along with revolutionary guards if the necessity arose. Two days later, Bani-Sadr appealed to the guardsmen to remain above the political rivalry being played out between the fundamentalists and their secular opponents.<sup>21</sup>

In the midst of this, the head of the IRGC, Abbas Zamani, also known as Abu Sharif, stepped down from his position of Commander, citing factionalism in the highly politicized Corps as his reason for leaving. He blamed "monopolism, sectarianism and existing tendencies" and stated, "We came to build an army under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, backed by people and God, to support the oppressed of the world and continue the Islamic Revolution. But, alas, power seeking and group divisions and other present tendencies prevented this movement."<sup>22</sup> When Bani-Sadr appointed Abu Sharif to the position, he stated it was a result of an almost unanimous vote by other corps commanders. The President tasked him to "put an end to group confrontations which have frustrated everybody." Abu Sharif was reported to have had differences with the other corps commanders over the organization's administration and he was unable to reach agreement with them. The former commander was credited with much of the organization of the revolutionary guards and was a guerrilla with the Shi's





Amal group in Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war.<sup>23</sup>

Instead of accepting Abu Sharif's request to step down, Bani-Sadr demoted him to Deputy Commander. His nominee for the position, Muhammed Kanzem Bojnurdi, refused the post, and finally, in July 1980, Mohsen Reza'i took command.<sup>24</sup>

In a further effort to control the IRGC, the Imam's representative to the Corps, in July 1980, submitted the following directive to the guardsmen to adhere to: 1. Officers would have to coordinate their military operations with other armed forces and could not act individually. 2. Those who were corrupt in faith, ideas and morals would be purged. 3. Those guards who seized property or land and arrested people without a lawful warrant would be handed over to the revolutionary courts. 4. Full discipline in the Corps and full obedience to the Commander-in-Chief and the Corps Commander should be observed and a Justice Council (Figure 2) would be established within the Corps to prosecute violators.<sup>25</sup>

In April 1981, after a 3 day nation-wide seminar, the IRGC commanders issued a resolution which demanded more solidarity between the Corps and the armed forces and also expanded on the duties and responsibilities of the IRGC. The 7 articles of the resolution were as follows:

1. The IRGC has full responsibility for implementing Islamic doctrines and principles of the law because of its spiritual loyalty to Velayat-e Fagih.





2. The IRGC will contribute to the exportation of the Islamic Revolution by any means.

3. The IRGC is faithfully committed to Velayat-e Fagih and will fulfill the Imam's revolutionary expectations precisely.

4. With the proclamation of the "Year of Law," it is expected that the Islamic Consultative Assembly, Majlis, the Cabinet, the Supreme Judiciary Council will coordinate their activities with the IRGC and the armed forces to prevent counterrevolution and to reduce the number of casualties in the war with Iraq.

5. The IRGC renewed its pledge to the Constitution, the Imam's divine concepts, and the orders of the Revolutionary Prosecutor-General to secure the Republic against illegal political parties.

6. The mobilization of the "20 Million Member Army" is the critical responsibility of the IRGC.

7. The IRGC gives its undivided support to Islamic revolutionary movements around the world.

#### D. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE IRGC

Since its inception, the IRGC has grown in leaps and bounds, in terms of numbers, as well as organizational structure. Figure 1 is an initial effort to clarify the relationship of the Corps to the Supreme Defense Council (SDC) and the other armed services, while Figure 2 shows a proposed internal structure of the Corps. Certainly, neither chart is the definitive piece on the IRGC and should serve as a basis for future research on the topic.

On 12 October 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini ordered the formation of a 7-man Supreme Defense Council (Figure 1) in order to establish discipline and an effective chain of command in the face of Iranian failures to repel Iraqi invaders.



The SDC placed all of the armed forces, including the IRGC, under a unified command, a move that should have been done at the outbreak of the war. However, resistance by the IRGC had prevented its formation earlier.<sup>27</sup>

Khomeini issued a decree on the authority of the SDC and directed that the following points be implemented:

1. The SDC would supervise all matters related to the Iran/Iraq war in conjunction with a deputy representing the Majlis. The Council must coordinate all armed forces which are duty bound to obey the SDC's orders.
2. The armed forces must follow the decisions of the SDC at the battlefronts.
3. The SDC will supervise publicity campaigns by radio, television and press. The mass media and press must obtain permission from the SDC before publishing interviews, speeches, or writings.
4. The responsibility for foreign policy related to defense lies with the SDC and no one is allowed to interfere with it without permission.
5. Those who violate this decree are subject to arrest and delivery to revolutionary courts.
6. The Council must assign representatives to battle areas.<sup>28</sup>

The SDC was formed "according to the instructions of the Imam to guide on the war affairs and its propaganda." As part of the Council, a Publicity Committee was created to coordinate foreign and internal publicity, publish "authentic" and quick news reports, coordinate radio and television programs, and "display a united front against the enemy." To coordinate these activities, the Publicity Committee issued ordinances to cover the following:



1. The mass media would coordinate reports and interviews that were related to political, military and security issues with the SDC.
2. Interviews, statements and reports would not be published without first checking with the Publicity Committee.
3. The Joint Staff Command of the Armed Forces, the Security Headquarters of Tehran and other organizations active in political, security and military issues were directed to publish their statements through the Publicity Committee.
4. Offices of the Islamic Government abroad, under the direction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, were required to place all of their publicity and community facilities at the disposal of the Headquarters.
5. The Ministry of Islamic Guidance would make its facilities available to the Headquarters for the supply of foreign and domestic publicity.
6. In issues relating to law enforcement and foreign reports, the activities were to be coordinated by the IRGC, committees, gendarmerie, and the police.

In May 1981, the Publicity Committee was renamed the War Publicity Staff.<sup>30</sup>

In November 1980, Dr. Mostafa Chamran, the Defense Minister and a member of the Supreme Defense Council, announced the formation of a headquarters for the coordination of guerrilla warfare tactics (Figure 1) in Khuzistan. This headquarters was seen as a "unifying link" between the army, the IRGC and the Mobilization (Baseej) forces. Speaking of the coordination efforts between the guerrilla squads and the other forces, Chamran said, "Its most important aspect is the people's faith and self-sacrificing efforts to further the revolution and its Islamic mission. Therefore, if we were to limit all our forces





to the army, we would clearly be mistaken. Our power is the power of the people, the power of those huge waves of people who enter the scene of the battle overflowing with faith and enthusiasm to create human epics... We can't afford to overlook the people's resources. The Revolutionary Guards Corps itself is a reflection of the people's force which has organized the youth."<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, on the first anniversary of the establishment of the "20 Million Member Army," (see Baseej) a military spokesman told of the mobilization of the people against the superpowers. He stated that, in an attempt to keep the United States from regaining a foothold in Iran again, the IRGC had organized a long-term project based on 3 premises:

1. Military training was to extend throughout the country and reach every level of society, including the minorities.
2. Ideological education would be implemented to educate soldiers for Islam and arm the men with "piety and revolutionary morale."
3. These forces would be organized in order to "penetrate the hearts of villages and towns to mobilize the people against superpowers' plots."<sup>32</sup>

The military training referred to was entrusted in August 1980 to the army which was also made responsible for the training of the committees and the Baseej. In addition, the army was to meet their needs with regards to ammunition, food, transportation, medicine, and other logistical requirements that the Corps may have.<sup>33</sup>

In April 1982, the Prime Minister introduced the formation of a Coordination Council for Islamic Revolutionary movements





throughout the country in an effort to provide coordination among various revolutionary organizations. Councils for the provinces and cities would be established under the supervision of Governor-Generals, Governors, Friday prayer leaders, and heads of the revolutionary institutions, in which the IRGC was included.<sup>34</sup>

#### E. INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF THE IRGC

In many cases, one can merely guess at the internal structure of the Corps, since a branch might be mentioned casually in a newspaper, with little indication of what chain of command it follows in the organization. Unfortunately, this is more often the rule than the exception. Therefore, the following explanation of the internal structure of the IRGC (Figure 2) will be sketchy at best.

1. The Command Council of the Guards is responsible for the appointment of operational commanders, and this is done every 6 months for the Commander of the IRGC in Tehran, which is not to be confused with the overall Commander of the Corps.<sup>35</sup>

2. The Imam's representative in the Corps is the Ayatollah's eyes and ears within the Corps and delivers directives to the commanders from Khomeini. In a July 1980 directive, it was ordered that a Justice Council be established within the Corps to prosecute those who violated orders from the Commander-in-Chief as well as the commanders



of the various services. It is suggested that this Justice Council is under the jurisdiction of the Prosecutor of the IRGC.<sup>36</sup>

3. The Public Relations Office of the Central Command issues communiques to the public concerning activities of the IRGC. One such communique attempted to clear up confusion over who was and was not a legitimate guardsman. It informed the public that all guardsmen were dressed in official uniforms, carried official I.D. cards, and in the case of an assignment, carried assignment papers.

The Publications Departments also deals with the cultural aspects of the IRGC and helps to propagandize views on the Islamic Revolution to the rest of the world. The magazine, Message of the Revolution, is printed by the IRGC, and like their other publications, is an attempt to advise the guards as well as act as a guideline for others.<sup>37</sup>

4. Any grievances against the Corps are brought to the attention of the Prosecutor-General of the IRGC.<sup>38</sup>

5. There is also a Coordination Headquarters for Public Education which organizes those men and women who have received military education.<sup>39</sup>

6. Each service has a Politico-Ideological Office, as well as a Reconstruction Jihad, which works with the engineering units of the Corps.<sup>40</sup> It has set up logistical, cultural and relief activities, as well as repair shops, moved war wounded and POW's, and supplied foodstuffs and ammunition.<sup>41</sup>



7. The Center for the Promotion of Islamic Movements is a division of the IRGC and urges Iranians to support Islamic movements throughout the world by giving donations to the Bank of Melli Iran in Qom. The account was opened by Ayatollah Montazeri.<sup>42</sup>

Another unit which deals with the exportation of the Islamic Revolution is the Liberation Movements Unit which may well have ties with the Center for the Promotion of Islamic Movements. Its purpose is to establish "fraternal relations and contacts with those movements fighting for freedom from the servitude and fetters of Western and Eastern imperialism and world Zionism." The Islamic Revolution in Iran is to act as the example for the future successes of similar revolutions.<sup>43</sup> According to Mohsen Reza'i, the Commander of the IRGC, the Corps had established relations with over 70 revolutionary movements throughout the Islamic world by July 1981.<sup>44</sup>

As a step towards implementing liberation movements, the Golan Battalion was formed as "a more massive army of the Muslim world for liberating Qods (Jerusalem)." This was in response to a Jordanian campaign to raise a force to fight alongside the Iraqis in the Iran/Iraq war. The Joint Staff was given permission to form the battalion, however, it was IRGC Commander Reza'i who announced the Golan Battalion's formation and said it would consist of refugees, "volunteer" Iraqi POW's and revolutionary guardsmen.<sup>45</sup> Once formed, the volunteer force would be dispatched whenever Syria was ready





to station the battalion on the borders to "fight against the Zionist regime."<sup>46</sup> In June 1982, a joint communique issued by the army command and the IRGC announced the deployment of Iranian volunteer units to southern Lebanon but no mention was made of the Golan Battalion.<sup>47</sup>

The IRGC also works with the National Organization of Scouts in the area of frontier scouting and the implementation of a war training center. Although this unit may also be an aspect of Baseej training, it is more likely to be under the auspices of the Center for the Promotion of Islamic Movements since the Scouts organization asked permission to send 2000 scouts along with 2000 "revolutionary fighters" to Mecca during the Haj (pilgrimage) ceremonies, in order to "introduce and spread the message of the Islamic Revolution." Certainly, that aspect of the Scouts would be responsible to the Islamic Movements Center.<sup>48</sup> Leading Iran's mass Haj to Mecca, is Hojatolislam Mousavi Khoeyniha, clerical advisor to the Students Following the Imam's Line who seized the American Embassy on 4 November 1979.<sup>49</sup>

Although not specifically assigned to the IRGC, a Youth Corps was established in January 1980, and was tasked with spreading Khomeini's revolutionary message throughout the Moslem world. Since its inception, one of the main functions of the IRGC has been the exportation of the Islamic Revolution. It is therefore assumed that the Youth Corps, like the Scouts Organization, takes its direction from the IRGC. The Youth





Corps was to be trained in Qom by religious and ideological instructors and would "create a pioneering force of young men who will lead the revolutionary struggle and outline the road to export the Islamic Revolution to its natural dimension throughout the Moslem countries until they are united under the banner of Islam." The purpose of the Corps was to establish a "special ideological training program for Arab youth." This was seen by Arab countries as an attempt by the Iranians to form cells of supporters for the Ayatollah throughout the Arab world.

The training program for the youths would consist of 2 months of "ideological and religious training" and youths up to 25 years old who knew Arabic, had a university degree, and who had good religious standing were eligible to join. The principle recruiting station was to be set up in Abadan where many ethnic Arabs live.<sup>50</sup>

8. Following the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini stressed that an "Islamic country had to be military in all aspects and equipped with military training." It was his feeling that in order for the Islamic Republic to survive, Iran's 20 million youths should be armed and, therefore, protect the nation with an invulnerable shield. In order to provide this "20 Million Member Army," the Baseej-e Mostazafin (Mobilization of the Oppressed) was formed on 26 November 1979 under the jurisdiction of the IRGC. It was established to "safeguard the fruits of the Islamic Revolution" when the United



States threatened economic sanctions, froze Iranian assets, and the U.S. fleet approached the Persian Gulf following the student takeover of the American Embassy. Comprised mostly of teenagers and younger individuals, the Baseej also recruits women, students, office workers, and trains its people in military techniques and weaponry. Aside from military training, the Baseej also augments the political and ideological education of its members.<sup>51</sup> In June 1982, it was announced by the head of the Public Mobilization (Baseej) of the IRGC, Hojatolislam Salek, that 46 summer training camps would be established in order to "raise the level of political, ideological and military knowledge of the popular forces of the "20 Million Member Army."<sup>52</sup>

With branches throughout Iran, in addition to being responsible for improving on the ideological, political and military knowledge of the Iranian people, the Baseej was also tasked with safeguarding cities and towns and maintaining their security. They have encountered smugglers and counterrevolutionaries and, following the outbreak of the Iran/Iraq war, the Baseej sent its members to the fronts, which is their most important duty at present. Imbued with "total faith and reliance on Almighty Allah," the Baseej members "fight without any expectation of reward, recognition, and if martyred in the battle, they fall unknown." Incidents such as the taking of 40 Iraqi prisoners by a



teenager, walking across minefields to clear a path for regular units and running headlong into Iraqi positions in suicidal human wave assaults have all been attributed to members of the Baseej.<sup>53</sup>

9. The Social Affairs office coordinates and organizes those men and women who are placed on alert by the mobilization unit in each IRGC headquarters. Those who have completed their training in mosques and military barracks, as well as those students who undergo a 10-day summer course may be placed on alert. It is not certain if these mobilization units operate out of District headquarters or are at the provincial level.<sup>54</sup>

10. The Information Unit of the IRGC appears to be an intelligence branch which is mentioned infrequently in communiques. It was responsible for tracking former Foreign Minister, Sadeq Qotbzadeh, and arresting him for an attempted coup plot in April 1982.<sup>55</sup> Reference has been made to the "36 Million Information Unit" which has been credited, along with the IRGC, in uncovering counterrevolutionary plots and the coup plot of Sadeq Qotbzadeh. In one instance, the Tehran Times (12 January 1982, p. 2) referred to the "36 Million Member Information Unit" as the Iranian people. However, this could also be the official title of the Information Unit of the IRGC.

11. Operational responsibility is shared with the army, although the IRGC and the army have separate chains of command.





Commanders appear to be interchangeable, as an army officer may be the Operational Commander of an IRGC headquarters. Iranian newspapers stress this as being a further indication of the unity between the two services.<sup>56</sup> The army is also responsible for training guards in army units in areas such as weapons handling and parachuting. Operational responsibility within the IRGC is further broken down to the provincial level where there is a headquarters<sup>57</sup> and to a district level which can act as military, political and ideological training centers for guards as well as Baseej units.<sup>58</sup> Each IRGC headquarters has a mobilization unit which places those who have received training on alert. (see 9)

12. Guards are also used by Anti-Narcotics headquarters which operate from committees in various cities.<sup>59</sup> Considered independent institutions, the committees, in April 1982, came under the jurisdiction and supervision of the Ministry of Interior, which was also tasked with the security (police, gendarmerie and committees) functions in Iran. Authority over military forces-ground, air, naval forces, and the IRGC-was delegated to the Chief of the Joint Staff. It was stressed that guards working with these committees would not be merged with the police force.<sup>60</sup>

#### F. AN IDEOLOGICAL ARMY

"You have offered in the path of Allah the biggest asset you had: your life and soul. It is the same of those who were martyred and may they be now in the presence





of Allah. What really matters is such a willingness (for martyrdom). You are sacrificing your lives, marching towards the battlefields of war equipped with the ideology of martyrdom, defending Islam and your school of thought, and are frustrating the countries which look on this country with eyes full of greed. What made you victors and is bringing you success is that faith and sincerity you have. A thing you possess but they do not. You enter into combat for Allah and they for the Devil. They belong to the party of Satan and you belong to the party of God."<sup>61</sup>

- Ayatollah Khomeini, 1982

Religion has historically played an important role in Iran's national identity and traces its roots to those followers of Ali, son-in-law of Muhammad, who believed that his male descendents should be the successors to the Prophet. Emotion ran high around the controversy of succession and political legitimacy and at the murder of Ali (661), his second son, Husayn, claimed leadership, but he and his followers were massacred by the Umayyad Caliph, Yazid, in 680 at Karbala. The date of the massacre, the tenth (Ashura) of Muharram (10 October), has since been emotionally celebrated by Shi'as (party of Ali) as they commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn and his brother, Hasan. Karbala is considered one of the holiest shrines of Shi'ism and is the scene of "passion plays" which reenact the massacre on its anniversary.<sup>62</sup> Exhibiting the depth of their grief over the martyrdom of Husayn, men and young boys cut their foreheads and parade through the streets beating their backs with chains.<sup>63</sup>

A pivotal belief in Shi'a Islam is the doctrine of the Imamate. In Shi'ism, the Imam possesses not only the temporal



sovereignty inherited from Muhammad, but also is an impeccable infallible teacher who is able to interpret the law.<sup>64</sup> Twelver Shi'ism, the majority sect, holds that there was a succession of 12 Imams to Muhammad al-Muntazar, who disappeared, is hidden, and is expected to return as a saviour (Mahdi) of the world.<sup>65</sup> Love and devotion to Ali, the first Imam, was the only guide for determining true faith. If an individual did not acknowledge the true Imam, then his salvation was lost. Shi'ism became the traditional opposition party as it not only insisted on the recognition of the rightful Imam, but also challenged the authority of existing governments. Those who found their right usurped by the rulers were attracted to Shi'ism and, as a result, it became a part of early revolutions.<sup>66</sup> Tashayyu (Shi'ism) came to represent the deprived and oppressed and in recent times, a more radical or defiant form has taken shape, "Tashayyu-i Alavi" or "Tashayyu-i Sorkh." It "strongly associates Islam as an ideology with revolutionary politics, the struggle against social and political tyranny, and the equitable distribution of wealth." Two of the most ardent proponents of this "theology of liberation" have been Ayatollah Khomeini and Dr. Ali Shariati.<sup>67</sup>

Following the Revolution, because of the military threats from outside of Iran as well as from counterrevolutionaries, Khomeini supported the establishment of an "ideological" army. In such an army, order and discipline would be strictly observed; posts and responsibilities were given in accordance



with competence and liability and not on the basis of relations; there should be no unjust discrimination and Islamic equity must rule; deeds, words, behavior, and regulations would be based on Islamic criteria; dictatorship, self-interest and monopoly were to be eliminated according to Article 3 of the Constitution.<sup>68</sup>

Unlike conventional governmental or military organizations, the revolutionary guards are considered to have the following special characteristics:

"Instead of employing individuals, as done by the various military and even revolutionary organizations and structures, the revolution guards corps accept membership. This means that it does not have a special section for appointing individuals, but has forces in charge of investigating and choosing personnel from among the volunteers. It has happened several times that 20, 30 or 40 volunteers offered their services, but no more than 2 of them were chosen to become members. The members must have faith in the Islamic creed and the unified world Islamic nation. These are among the qualifications required for membership. They must also have faith in the Islamic revolution and love of jihad and martyrdom. Those individuals who desire to obtain money must not join the revolution guards."<sup>69</sup>

References to the Qur'an emphasize that one should first become a conscious believer and then pursue a jihad. Therefore, an Islamic army should be armed with faith first and then with weapons. During Muhammad's time, faith lead the Islamic forces to victory and it is believed that today is no different. According to the Qur'an, a fighter who is imbued with faith is worth 10 times in fighting ability than a member who is not. Looking back in Islamic history, it is pointed out that in those wars fought in the founding





stages of Islam, in most of them, the enemy forces were between 3 and 10 times stronger than Islamic forces. It is believed that faith was their secret weapon, as it is today.<sup>70</sup> Said one young guardsman, "God is witnessing our actions. We are going from one world to a more exalted and lofty world. And we are ready to die because martyrdom is the best path to that world and we shall receive the greatest welcome."<sup>71</sup>

President Khomeini's stressed in a meeting with the IRGC members that it was on the battlefield and nowhere else where man could profoundly understand religion. It is also there that one sees the development of the human being under the effects of faith and commitment. He added that many Iranians would not have been as devoted and faithful without the war. He interpreted Ayatollah Khomeini's quote "Greatest of the victories" as what a man would achieve by being on the war fronts. It was not surprising that "enemies of the revolution" would be active against the IRGC because, as he stated, "You are the fruit of the revolution, with whose destruction, the revolution would be destroyed."<sup>72</sup> Said Khomeini about his ideological army, "The IRGC is equipped with Divine Power; their weapon is "Allaho Akbar," which no power in the world can counter."<sup>73</sup>





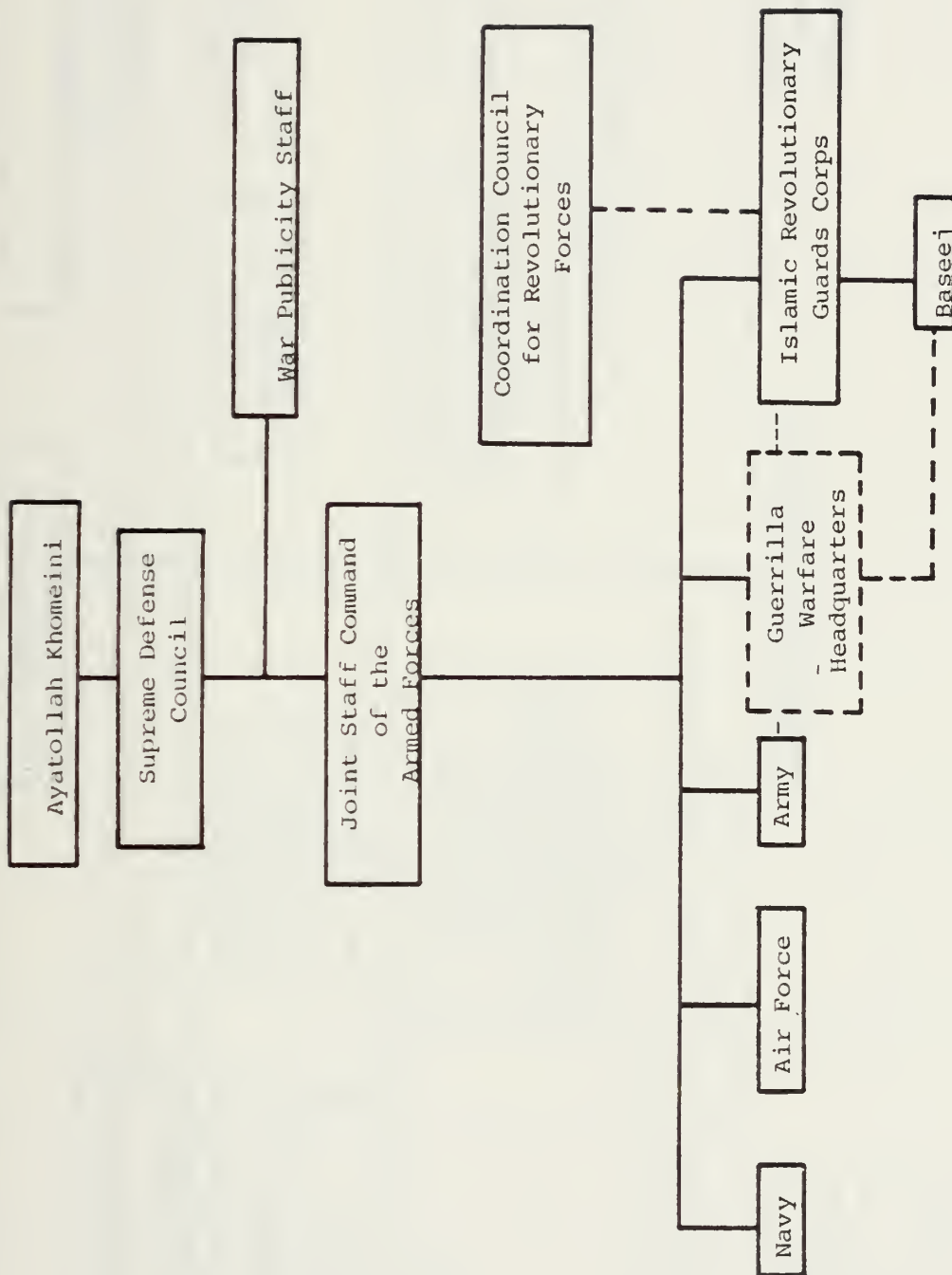


Figure 1. Joint Staff Command



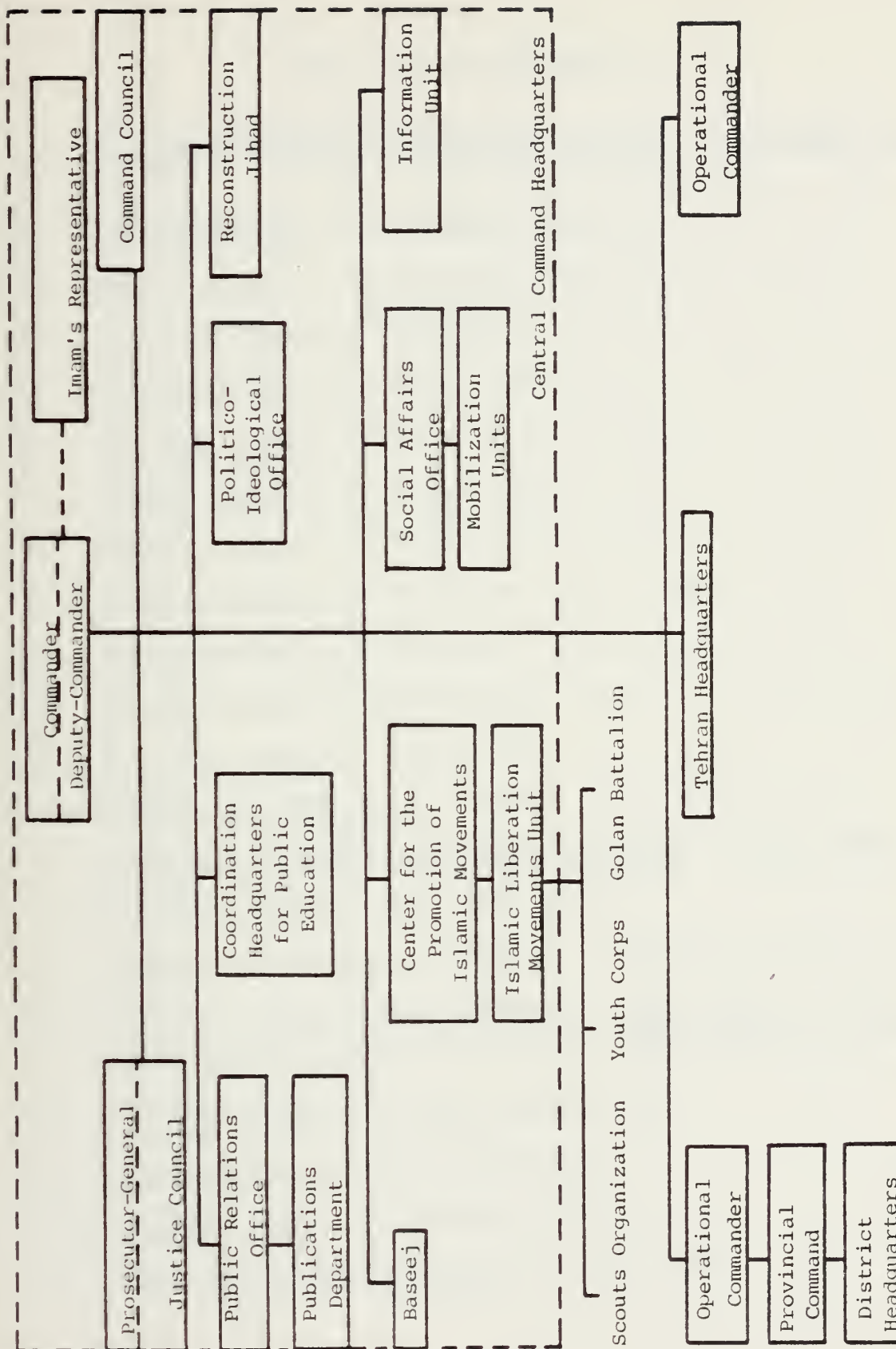


Figure 2. Internal Structure of IRGC



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### III. INTERNAL SECURITY

#### A. KURDS

##### 1. Background

Iran is a myriad of ethnic groups--eight major ones--whose tradition of resisting the central government is well established. However, it was the Kurds, shortly after the success of the Iranian revolution, who first pressed for their much desired autonomy from the central government and posed the strongest threat of open revolt.

Of the approximately 10-15 million Kurds, four million live in Iran, while the remainder are spread throughout Iraq, Turkey, and in smaller numbers in Syria, Lebanon and the Soviet Union. The dream of an independent Kurdish state was short-lived, when in 1946 there was a Soviet supported "Kurdish autonomous republic" with Mahabad as its capital. The Shah ended the republic a year later and forced the rebel leader, Mullah Mustafa Barzani, into the Soviet Union where he stayed in exile for 15 years. In the late 1950's he returned to Iraq to foment revolts and caused the Baghdad government to turn to the Soviets for help in this matter. In 1973, the Baathist government signed a "strategic alliance" with the USSR and invited a Marxist wing of Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) to participate in the government. As Iraq moved closer to Moscow, Barzani moved to the West,





accepting help from the CIA and Israel, through the Shah of Iran. In 1975 in Algiers, as part of the Iran-Iraq agreement, the Iranians ceased their aid to the Kurds which promptly ended their revolt. Within the Kurdish movement there were several political, mostly leftist, factions which alienated the more conservative element of the population. The most established is the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) which is suspected of being influenced by the Iraqi Baathists and has, therefore, lost some support. There is a leftist guerrilla group which operates on the Iraqi border, and a new group is emerging that was organized by Sayed Mohammad Nezami, an educator. The fourth group, which is not leftist, is composed of the followers of Mustafa Barzani.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Dashed Hopes

The Kurds enthusiastically joined in the Islamic revolution as it provided them with the hope that they would attain the recognition and autonomy that had been denied them for centuries. As many as two million Kurds fought along side Khomeini's forces, but the victory of the revolution was not to signal success for their cause. The spiritual and political leaders of the Kurds, Ayatollah Ezzedin Hosseini, remarked, "... for us, the Revolution is not over... We fought in the revolution not out of religious conviction but for political goals. We want autonomy--our own Parliament, our own language, our own culture. The Revolution has destroyed despotism, but it has not ended discrimination against minorities.



The revolution must go on until all major minority groups-- the Kurds here, the Turks in Azerbaijan, the Baluchis in the East--win a measure of autonomy." Another Kurd stressed that his people were not interested in a separate state, only autonomy, and since the new central government was still weak, he felt the time was right to press their demands. In the event that their demands were not met, he stated, "If we don't get autonomy, however, we will launch a guerrilla war. We have the experience and we have the guns."

The fledgling Islamic Republic feared that if it gave into the demands of the Kurds, a strong separatist movement might develop among the other minority groups and destroy any plans of an Islamic state. Quickly disillusioned with the results of the revolution, the Kurds in Mehabad seized an army barracks shortly after the Shah left Iran. Faced with open rebellion, Khomeini's government sent the Minister of Labor, Daryoush Farouhar, and a delegation to listen to the Kurd's demands, which, basically, asked for autonomy.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. The Fighting Begins

The unrest spread to Sanandaj, the provincial Kurdistan capital, where, in guerrilla-like fashion, the Kurds took to the roof tops to direct their gunfire against the local army barracks. The fighting began when the Kurds asked for ammunition, were refused, and then began a sit-in which ended violently.<sup>3</sup> Taking advantage of a short truce, the Kurds were able to reorganize and laid siege to the police station,



as well as the barracks and occupied the airfield and the radio station. In response to their attack on the army, Khomeini warned the Kurds that those who attacked the army would be considered foreign agents and counterrevolutionaries and that the armed forces would be told to respond with full force. Said Deputy Prime Minister Amir Entezam, "We shall crush the attackers. We will use all means at our disposal to put down the uprising. There are unscrupulous elements at work in Kurdistan who think they can take advantage of the situation because the army is weak. We want to show them the army is not weak."<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after the Kurds in Sanandaj received a promise of "semi-autonomy" from Hadj Said Djavadi, the Minister of the Interior, fighting broke out between Turkoman minorities and guardsmen in the town of Gonbad-e Qavus, near the Soviet border. As the central government had feared, the Kurdish desire for autonomy had permeated other ethnic minorities and resulted in still more violence. The Turkoman Political and Cultural Society, which had organized a boycott against the upcoming referendum on the Islamic Republic demanded that Turkomans be allowed membership in the local Komiteh, and that land in the area should no longer be owned by Iranians of non-Persian origin.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. The Calm before the Storm

Relative calm descended on the area after a Kurd was appointed governor general of the province of Kurdistan.





The Chief of the armed forces, General Valli Gharini, was dismissed by the provisional government after he ordered helicopter gunships to fire on the Kurds during the violence in Sanadaj. He had also been unable to convince thousands of officers and men to return to their units after the collapse of the Pahlavi dynasty.<sup>6</sup>

Other problems had begun to surface as a result of the influx of revolutionary guardsmen who were young, inexperienced and flushed with the relative ease of the success of the revolution. Enforcing their role as defenders of Iran's internal security, the guardsmen became the living symbol of what the Kurds despised most in the new government. Their radical and overt Shi'ism was a constant reminder to the Sunni Kurds of their continuing second-class status.

Tensions began to mount once more and fighting broke out again in Marivan near the Iraqi border in July. This was a result of a Kurdish complaint that the guards were arming local landlords so that they could seize lands given the peasants under the Shah's land reform program. To diffuse this, the government promised a delegation to investigate the guards' activities, and in return, the Kurds agreed not to carry arms and to help in the security of Marivan.<sup>7</sup>

#### 5. Open Revolt

The calm was very short lived as fighting broke out with the revolutionary guardsmen in the town of Paveh on the Iraqi border. State TV reported that the Kurdish rebels in



Paveh had beheaded 18 guardsmen after a 2,000 man Kurdish force attacked the city and overpowered the 200 guardsmen who were defending it. Ayatollah Khomeini acted swiftly, stepping over military and government leaders, ordering the armed forces to crush the rebellion in 24 hours. In his ultimatum to the army, Khomeini warned: "If no positive action has been taken within 24 hours, the heads of the army and state police will be held responsible." This was directed at those moderate officers who had dominated the army command at the end of the revolution and were reluctant to use the army units to quell the disturbances. A large part of this hesitation was based on past experiences where army commanders, who had carried out orders which were later to become politically unpopular, were later punished. The Ayatollah's order read as follows: "As head of the whole army, I give the orders to the army Commander-in-Chief to move into the area with all necessary preparations, and I also give orders to the army garrisons and state police forces that, without awaiting any further order and wasting any time, they move toward Paveh with the necessary ammunition, preparation and forces." This order followed an attack the Ayatollah made on the government and military for not exhibiting enough revolutionary zeal.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Khomeini banned the Kurdish Democratic Party for its part in the Paveh Rebellion saying it was "poison to the health of the revolution." The government also declared that the election of



the KDP's Secretary-General, Abdurahman Qassemlou, to the Assembly of Experts reviewing the draft of Iran's new constitution, was null and void.

Those Kurds captured by the government forces once Paveh was retaken, were executed for being "corrupt on earth and warriors against God and his prophets." Those captured received their sentencing in Ayatollah Khalkali's revolutionary courts, and the sentences were carried out by the IRGC.<sup>9</sup> As a response to these executions, the leaders of the KDP threatened retaliation in a communique which stated, "Now we have arrested many guards and if the executions (of Kurds) continue, the KDP will execute one revolutionary guard for each Kurd executed."<sup>10</sup>

No sooner had the situation in Paveh been diffused, than Ayatollah Khomeini put the armed forces on alert throughout the country and ordered them to put down a reported revolt in Sanandaj. The Governor of Kurdistan denied the rumors of violence and that hostages had been taken. He did relate a minor incident in which "Three lorry-loads of revolutionary guards were disarmed and prevented from leaving Sanandaj by the people of the city." There were also indications of discord within the armed forces at being ordered to put down this rebellion. Troops were cautioned that special courts would be convened for those soldiers who refused to obey orders or took part in the strikes.<sup>12</sup> Clearly, it appeared that the new government was hesitant to trust the armed





forces in maintaining internal security, as the threat of an army coup was uppermost in most of the politicians' minds. The problem, then, of taking care of internal security rested squarely on the shoulders of the revolutionary guardsmen, who had managed to alienate the Kurds. Evidence of this could be seen in the casualty reports where guardsmen, not regular army soldiers, had become targets for the Kurdish bullets.

#### 6. The 18-Day War

The second strong warning against military disobedience in a week was issued by the Ayatollah when government forces were put on the defensive in the town of Saqqez. In addition, Khomeini ordered the revolutionary guards to cooperate with the regular army, indicating there were even problems within the ranks of the armed forces. In order to restore morale, he stated: "I hereby announce my solemn backing for the Armed Forces, the State and regular police." In an effort to bring the rebellious tribesmen into line, he offered them amnesty and a day's oil revenue to cease their insurrection.<sup>13</sup>

In spite of their use of superior weapons and support from tanks, helicopters, heavy artillery and Phantoms, the guardsmen, although eventually victorious, proved to be a sad match against the haphazardly armed Kurds. In Saqqez, tribal guerrillas, who acquired reinforcements from neighboring towns, fought 5,000 revolutionary guardsmen against their 2,000 man force. Government troops were driven back 12 miles along the road to Sanandaj, and the Kurds were





able to lay siege to the army barracks in Saqqez. After two days, a combination of revolutionary guards and regular army troops were able to break through the Kurdish lines, but the battle for the city continued for another two days. The Kurds made a "tactical retreat" to the hills as both sides began preparing for a major battle over the Kurdish stronghold at Mahabad.<sup>14</sup>

All indications pointed to a fierce battle over Mahabad, however, after a concentrated air and armor attack, all the Kurdish guerrillas and many of the city's inhabitants escaped towards Sardasht in the south.<sup>15</sup> This occupation of the Kurdish stronghold seemed to have broken the back of the Kurdish resistance. As of 12 September, the 18-day war had ended with all Kurdish towns back in government control. As calm descended once again on the area, some Army officers advocated keeping a low profile and having the revolutionary guards withdrawn from Kurdistan "because their presence only worries the people." The army insisted that the guardsmen remain on the outskirts of Mahabad after its capture, because the "population felt reassured by the troops, but did not want the guards."<sup>16</sup>

## 7. Guerrilla Warfare

Just weeks after their retreat from Mahabad, the Kurds began waging a guerrilla war on dozens of towns, targeting revolutionary guardsmen in ambushes. These instances underlined the growing problem that the security forces were



encountering in the face of a very resilient Kurdish movement. In addition, the revolutionary guards were suffering from a "lack of acceptance" by the local population and proved to be easy targets in the Kurdish hit-and-run operations.<sup>17</sup> After one such operation, in which 50 guardsmen were killed, the Iranian Defense Minister, Dr. Chamran, flew to Kurdistan to take charge personally of the chaotic internal security system in light of the general disorder in the security forces. Major General Hassein Shaku, Chief of the Joint Military Staff, told of the chaotic state of affairs when he related the story of the ambush. The guardsmen who were ambushed, disobeyed orders not to leave their base near Sardasht, failed to report their departure and did not say where they were going. Communications was another area that had serious faults. Said the operations commander of the guards, Hossein Soltani, "practically all telephone or telegraphic messages we send are intercepted by the rebels, and they have prior information on all our operations." Faced with this organized Kurdish resistance, there were reports of closing revolutionary guards' garrisons.<sup>18</sup>

Dr. Chamran pledged that military operations against the rebels would intensify and that helicopters and tanks would be used to flush out the guerrillas. However, other military sources suggested that the real priority would be repairing relations between the regular army and the guards,



since the lack of cooperation between the two corps had only been magnified by the ambush in which 50 guardsmen were killed.<sup>19</sup>

#### 8. Cease Fire

The inability of the security forces to control the Kurdish situation was made evident when the guerrillas retook Mahabad and managed to kidnap the governor's representative in daylight. Fighting from Mahabad spread to other towns even as Ayatollah Khomeini appeared to reverse his policy of imposing a military solution on the guerrillas. In the midst of the renewed violence, the central government negotiated a cease-fire and promised to meet the Kurds' legitimate rights. A key provision in the cease-fire agreement was the promise of the withdrawals of the revolutionary guard units from the area. Later it was charged by a KDP spokesman that instead of the withdrawal that they had requested, the guardsmen and army units were being reinforced. A three man government mission met with members of the KDP to discuss the autonomy issue, but new unrest mounted in Kurdistan, as well as among the Azerbaijanis, Baluchis and Turkomans, as rioting over the referendum for the new Islamic constitution spread. Since these minority groups were mostly Sunni Moslems, their objections to the constitution came over the provision which made Shi'ism the official national religion.<sup>20</sup>

As new areas erupted in fighting, Iran entered a new phase of its revolution, that of regional violence. Even the





army was not left unscathed by this regionalism, since, traditionally, the backbone of the military officer corps came from Azerbaijan. Any faith in the former Shah's army might have been further weakened in view of the continuing violence, and Khomeini's confidence in being able to count on his armed forces certainly dwindled. The central government was forced to rely on the revolutionary guards to restore order which only compounded the regional complaints, as the guards did not observe local customs and in many instances, ransacked homes without search warrants.<sup>21</sup> In an attempt to keep the peace and restore the people's confidence, the Governor-General of Kurdistan ordered a group of revolutionary guards arrested for firing into an angry crowd.<sup>22</sup>

#### 9. Renewed Fighting

Once again, Mahabad became the focus of heavy fighting, as a result of a long promised government move in which the Deputy Governor of West Azerbaijan Province explained: "The objective of the operation is to purge the city of counter-revolutionaries as soon as possible."

After a lull of four months in the fighting, clashes broke out again, signalling the breakdown in negotiations. A standstill was reached when the Secretary-General of the KDP, Abdurahman Qassemlou, announced the Kurds would not put down their arms until they had received autonomy, and at the same time, President Bani-Sadr and the Revolutionary Council hardened their stand.<sup>23</sup> Following this, heavy fighting broke out in



May 1980 in Saqqez, Sardasht, Baneh and Marivan. In a surprise move, after throwing 10,000 fighters into the city, the rebels withdrew from Sanandaj, and the government took advantage of this by presenting this as a victory. In fact, it was a move to harrass the government troops.

When the Iranian troops retook the city, they found the bodies of 48 of their men dumped in a ditch outside of the city. Inside, the bodies of 45 pasdars were found buried in a mass grave. The rebels had been able to hold onto the city for a month by blockading the streets and maintained communications through the sewers and a series of trenches.<sup>24</sup> The extent of the carnage was so great in the month long siege at Sanandaj, that bodies were often burned quickly in the courtyards of private homes. Speaking of the guardsmen, a Kurd whose brother was killed in a house search in Sanandaj, said, "They've committed worse atrocities than anything seen in Vietnam." Sheikh Hosseini reemphasized the hatred of the guards when he remarked, "The Iranian Army can stay, but the revolutionary guards must go."

Shortly after the September 1980 outbreak of the Iran/Iraq war, fighting in Kurdistan began again, this time with Baghdad's help. Kurdish guerrillas struck at Iranian troops from mountain bases behind Iraq's front line, and Baghdad backed Kurdish demands for autonomy. The insurgents were also receiving money and weapons from the Iraqi government as well as help from Iraqi officers.<sup>25</sup> In some areas of



the northwest region, Iranian troops found themselves fighting against the Iraqi invasion in the west and the Kurds on the east of the frontier. In an attempt to ease its "two front" or "second war" dilemma, the Iranian government offered pardons to those insurgents who would lay down their arms. Like the previous appeals and ultimatums made by the Islamic government, this one also went unheeded.<sup>26</sup>

After two years of sporadic fighting, the clashes became heavy once again, as the Kurds regained Mahabad. The guerrillas were able to mount a successful counterattack because two Iranian divisions were withdrawn from the area to boost forces elsewhere.<sup>27</sup> According to recent boasts by Secretary General Qassemlou, "We have now a liberated territory of 60,000 square kilometres (about half of Iranian Kurdistan) which we totally control, except the main roads through which the Pasdars can travel during the day but not during the night."<sup>28</sup> Qassemlou summed up the Kurdish situation when he said, "We were fighting Khomeini before the Iraqis, and I have the impression we'll be fighting him after them too."<sup>29</sup>

## B. THE MUJAHIDIN-E KHALQ ORGANIZATION (MKO)

### 1. Background

There are two noteworthy armed leftist groups which claimed a key role in the revolution and, therefore, felt they had earned the right to a voice in what transpired next





in the government. They operated throughout the 1970's as underground urban guerrillas, often attacking U.S. military personnel who symbolized the Shah's regime.<sup>30</sup>

The Fedayeen-e Kahlq is a nationalist, Marxist group on the far left which draws its support from students and radical members of the intelligentsia. In 1980, the Fedayeen split into three groups--the Fedayeen Guerrillas (Cherikha), the Minority (Aqaliyyat), and the Majority (Aksariyyat). The Guerrilla and Minority groups have chosen to pursue radical goals, while the Majority has shown a desire to compromise with the right wing extremist Iranian Republican Party (IRP).<sup>31</sup> But it was the Mujahidin, the largest organization numbering approximately 100,000, which became the most feared of the opposition groups. Like the Fedayeen, the Mujahidin was formed in the 1960's but had its origins from the religious wing of the National Front and in particular, the Liberation Movement of Iran. Beginning with a small group of nine in Tehran, it expanded into cells throughout the country and began a guerrilla training program when it sent six of its members to a PLO training camp in Jordan. Espousing a "classless" society, the Mujahidin concluded that true Shi'ism was against depotism, capitalism, imperialism, and conservative clericalism.<sup>32</sup> Their feeling on religion was as follows: "After years of extensive study into Islamic history and Shi'ite ideology, our organization has reached the firm conclusion that Islam, especially Shi'ism, will play a major





role in inspiring the masses to join the revolution. It will do so because Shi'ism, particularly Hussein's historic act of resistance, has both a revolutionary message and a special place in our popular culture."<sup>38</sup>

Although the Mujahidin was oriented towards Islam, it developed an ideology not too far removed from the Marxist Fedayeen. In 1975, the organization split into two factions, those who wanted to declare the Mujahidin a Marxist-Leninist organization (Pakyar) while the other faction wanted to retain its Islamic orientation. Each organization had its own publications, armed wing, and activities which included bank robberies, bombings, and assassinations. By the outbreak of the revolution, the two Mujahidin factions and the Fedayeen groups had several years of guerrilla experience and were equipped for the ensuing confrontation. They were further bolstered in early 1978 when the Shah released 618 political prisoners. This enabled the groups to mount a major assault on the army when members of the Shah's elite Imperial Guard tried to thwart a coup attempt by air force cadets in Tehran. The guerrillas moved en masse to the aid of the cadets and successfully defeated the Guards. Prisons were opened, and police stations, armories, and military bases were ransacked with similar instances occurring in the provinces. The Iranian Revolution had become a part of history.<sup>34</sup>



## 2. Aftermath of the Revolution

Soon after Ayatollah Khomeini's return to Iran, it became apparent that those groups that had aided in the downfall of the Shah would not be content without some voice in the new government. The People's Mujahidin (Islamic Freedom Fighters) issued a warning to Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, head of the provisional government, stating that if their demands went unmet, "the revolution would be faced with serious problems." Massoud Rajavi, the head of the Mujahidin, demanded the immediate dissolution of the ex-Shah's army and its replacement by a "People's Army." Along with the Fedayeen, the Mujahidin further called for the establishment of "People's Councils" which would administer public affairs and hold public trials.

Some 300,000 weapons were looted from government arsenals during the revolution, and both guerrilla groups refused to surrender their share.<sup>35</sup> Because of this refusal to disarm, the provisional government which had been unable to establish proper control over the country, was threatened with a serious problem. Ayatollah Khomeini called on the army and police to return to their posts and cooperate in defeating this threat to Iran. In a strong warning, Khomeini stated, "All sections of the community, under any name, must pursue their activities under the Islamic flag, otherwise, their actions would constitute an uprising against the revolutionary Islamic government, the punishment for which under Islamic law is quite clear."<sup>36</sup>



### 3. Counterrevolutionaries

It was the revolutionary guards, whose task it was to maintain internal security, who were eventually called upon to deal with the Mujahidin. Fiercely attacking the leftists as "Counterrevolutionaries" Ayatollah Khomeini called for a "purge of Westernized thought from the universities" where the Mujahidin and other groups had established their strongholds. The Mujahidin, composed mainly of students and middle class intellectuals, had been forced out of their offices and onto university campuses where guardsmen, at the disposal of the Bureau for the Campaign against Sin, made raids against their illegal pamphlet and cassette operations.<sup>37</sup> The Revolutionary council ordered the leftists to close their campus offices and Ayatollah Khomeini called for the early closing of the universities in order to carry out a cultural revolution which would purge Western thought. Campuses throughout Iran were overrun by the Students Following the Imam's Line, the militants who were also holding the U.S. embassy officials hostage. As they overran the universities, the militants demanded "Islamification." Revolutionary guardsmen were on hand, firing into the air in order to separate the groups.<sup>38</sup> Similar violence continued and reached a height in June 1980 when 100,000 Mujahidin, involved in a rally in a stadium across from the U.S. embassy, spilled into the streets and were attacked by fundamentalists. The IRGC opened fire on tens





of thousands of rioting demonstrators and more than 300 people were injured in the ensuing five hour gun battle.<sup>39</sup>

#### 4. The Bombing Era

It was not until June 1981, when Bani-Sadr was dismissed as President of the Islamic Republic, that Iran felt the full force of the wrath of the Mujahidin who had backed the President. Later, the MKO helped smuggle Bani-Sadr and Massoud Rajavi to France. While the Majlis was in the process of impeaching Bani-Sadr, the Mujahidin distributed a phamplet which "declared war" on the government. Shortly after this, on 28 June, the MKO made good on its "declaration" by bombing the IRP headquarters, killing Ayatollah Beheshti, Secretary-General of IRP along with others. The fundamentalists struck back immediately, as the IRGC arrested and executed scores of MKO members.<sup>40</sup> But, in spite of stepped up government attacks on them, the leftists refrained from plunging the country into a full scale war, preferring instead to conduct guerrilla raids and bombings. Guards set up road blocks and fortified mosques, IRP headquarters and IRGC headquarters because of the frequency of these attacks. The MKO boldly drove up to the guards' bases and roadblocks and attacked them with bombs, submachine guns, and Molotov cocktails. Said one Iranian, "It's the beginning of the second revolution."<sup>41</sup> As the violence spiraled upwards, an average of 12 guardsmen a day were reported killed or wounded as a result of Mujahidin



activities. A shortage of guards and trusted armed personnel was suspected when Radio Tehran on 2 September urged volunteers to join the IRGC training program and called on guards to interrupt their "vacations" and return to active duty.<sup>42</sup>

On 30 August 1981, while discussing the mounting internal security problem in Iran, President Rajai, Prime Minister Bahonar and six others were killed by a bomb which Massoud Keshmiri, a highly trusted security official and a member of the Mujahidin, had planted. These two men had been placed on the top of Bani-Sadr's list of five men whose deaths could bring about the collapse of the Khomeini government. The extent to which the MKO had managed to infiltrate the upper echelons of the government, including the security apparatus, became even more frighteningly obvious when a bomb was discovered in Khomeini's house in Mamaran. The fuse had been removed, and a note was attached calling for the Ayatollah's surrender.<sup>43</sup> In order to remedy this apparent breakdown in internal security, Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani was appointed as Prime Minister and promised to restore internal security. He announced changes would occur within the IRGC and police, organizations which, because of their ineptitude, were held responsible for allowing the June 28 bombing to occur. In the week following the bombing, more than 200 people were executed as calls for revenge grew louder. Said one clergyman, "One should not mourn but be decisive and revenge the blood of the martyrs."<sup>44</sup>



But stepped up government attacks only served to increase the MKO's resolve against the clergy. The Mujahidin employed a suicide attack for the first time when Ayatollah Assodollah Madani, while leading Friday prayer, was killed by a man detonating a hand grenade. MKO members took part in "armed demonstrations," where their armed men surrounded demonstrators and engaged in gun battles with the IRGC. They also enticed guardsmen into protracted fighting when the pasdars attempted to storm Mujahidin hideouts.<sup>45</sup> In one seven hour gun battle, conducted in a six square mile area, IRGC members who were in the process of pursuing protestors, were trapped by Mujahidin who positioned themselves on rooftops and succeeded in killing 36 guardsmen.

These and other operations served to demonstrate that, in spite of numerous purges, the MKO had managed to maintain its command structure and organizational efficiency. The guerrillas were commanded in Iran by Mousa Khiabani who operated from a bunker in Tehran. Members kept in touch through the use of walki-talkies, shortwave radios, "safe" phone lines and, in some cases, carrier pigeons. In addition, the organization boasted a 5,000 man intelligence network which had penetrated the Khomeini hierarchy. In response to the purges conducted against his organization's members, Rajavi said: "The Resistance is prepared to pay the heaviest price possible to liberate Iran from the shackles of reactionary rule."<sup>46</sup>





## 5. Victory Claims over the MKO

By December 1981, the government was claiming victory over the guerrillas, having executed some 3,000 members since the flight of Bani-Sadr and Rajavi. According to the exiled MKO leader, these figures did not include secret executions. Government repression even extended into the high schools where male and female students were subjected to extensive searches. This was not unprovoked, as Ayatollah Pastgheib, Khomeini's representative in Shiraj, was killed when a young school girl detonated a bomb which was strapped to her. In speaking of this and other incidents, Rajavi said that MKO members were attempting to eliminate "the lower level officials responsible for torture and the executions... Although when we find a chance we get someone like Pastgheib as well."<sup>47</sup>

A severe blow was dealt the MKO in early February 1982, when the IRGC, in a two day operation named "Ten Day Dawn," discovered the hideout of the organization's operational commander in Tehran, Mousa Khiabani. His death, and that of 21 other MKO members, was a serious setback, and IRGC commander Reza'i "stressed that with the destruction of the MKO Central Committee, its end was proven."<sup>48</sup> During the sweep, six MKO hideouts were overrun, thus dealing a supposedly "mortal blow" to the organization. Since February, the MKO has been subjected to a series of successful raids by guardsmen, decimating their leadership within Iran. In





May, ten top members were killed, two of whom had been the MKO's candidates for the Parliament two years earlier.<sup>49</sup>

The former President Bani-Sadr and MKO leader, Rajavi, have established a National Resistance Council headquartered in Paris since their flight in July 1981. Their strategy has been to continue to wear down the Khomeini forces and to "break the barrier of terror" that has prevented many Iranians from openly opposing Khomeini.<sup>50</sup> Rajavi understands that he cannot tackle the fundamentalists head on as long as the Ayatollah lives. "Without the Ayatollah," said one Western diplomat, "I shudder to think of the magnitude of the battle between the mullahs and the Left might acquire."<sup>51</sup>



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#### IV. IRAN/IRAQ WAR

##### A. BACKGROUND

The Iran/Iraq war was the culmination of a decade of smoldering tensions and clashes along the frontier. It rekindled a great cultural and ethnic clash which was first determined between the Arabs and Persians in A.D. 637 with the Arab victory at the Battle of Qaddisiyah. That battle brought the Persian Sassanid Empire to an end, along with its Zoroastrian religion. This was a bitter defeat for the Persians who were contemptuous of the ethnically different Semetic Arabs who had sprung from the desert. This age-old hostility has now manifested itself in the current Iran/Iraq war.<sup>1</sup> President Saddam Hussein of Iraq has pointed to the original Arab victory over the Persians and accused the Ayatollah of attempting to reverse this historical decision through the current war.<sup>2</sup>

A more modern explanation for the outbreak of the war is the desire of Saddam Hussein to assume the dominant role in the Gulf since the overthrow of the Shah and the deterioration of the Iranian army.<sup>3</sup> Central to this assumption of power, is the control of the three strategic islands in the Strait of Hormuz--Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs--which Iran annexed in 1971 following the withdrawal of British colonial authorities.<sup>4</sup> In the Iranian-Iraqi accord



of 1975 which was signed in Algiers. Iraq recognized Iranian claims to the islands, and the border region was readjusted, giving the Iranians partial sovereignty in the Shatt al-Arab, the estuary of the Tigris and Euphrates which comprises a portion of the Iran-Iraq frontier at the head of the Persian Gulf. The Shah, in turn, discontinued aid to the Iraqi Kurds, who were involved in an insurrection against the Iraqi central government. Because of this, the 10 year old Kurdish insurrection collapsed quickly.<sup>5</sup>

Each country has ethnic or religious minorities which are vulnerable to subversion by the other. Iran has non-Persian Kurds and Arabs whom the central government has difficulty harnessing. Both of these groups live near or on the Iraqi border which allows Iraq to exploit easily their disaffection with the new Iranian government. More than half of the Iraqi population is composed of Shi'a Arabs whose grievances against Hussein's Sunni government are easily exploited by Khomeini, who spent 10 of his 14 years in exile in two of Shi'a Islam's holiest shrines, Najaf and Karbala, both in Iraq.<sup>6</sup> The Shi'a Muslims tend to be poorer than the Sunnis in Iraq and have been excluded from power since Iraq gained its independence after World War I. Since the success of the Islamic Revolution, unrest among the Iraqi Shi'ites, especially in Najaf and Karbala, has increased. Tensions continued to seethe after a senior Shi'a colleague of Khomeini's, Ayatollah Muhammad Bakr Al-Sadr, was executed in Iraq for heading the



subversive organization known as "Al-Daawa" (The Call). The rift between Sunnis and Shi'ites deepened in early 1980 when as many as 35,000 Iraqi Shi'ites were expelled from Iraq into Iran following two assassination attempts against Baathist leaders in grenade attacks.<sup>7</sup>

A week before the outbreak of the war, President Hussein abrogated the 1975 pact with Iran thereby asserting Iraq's primary in the Gulf. The agreement had given Iran the right to share the sovereignty over the waterway with Iraq, and in an address Hussein stated "From here on, the Shatt al-Arab is totally Iraqi and totally Arab."<sup>8</sup> The Iraqi Deputy Premier, Tareq Aziz, set forth the following Iraqi demands: 1. recognition of Iraq's legitimate rights and sovereignty over all of its territories and waters; 2. agreement on conducting neighborly relations with Iraq and other countries in the area; 3. non-interference in the affairs of other countries and the cessation of all aggressive actions. In addition, he claimed the Shatt al-Arab as Iraqi territory but said it was for the people of Khuzistan province, who are mostly ethnic Arabs, to determine who owned the three strategic islands north of the Strait of Hormuz.<sup>9</sup>

## B. THE BEGINNING

For months before the actual war broke out, Iraq persistently attacked border points in the Iranian Kermanshah and Ilam regions in an effort to wear down Iranian armor and use





up their spare parts. Iran, on the other hand, kept its counterattacks to a minimum. The Iraqi surprise attack came on 22 September 1980, with the quick bombing of Mehrabad airport in Tehran, leaving little damage and allowing Iranian planes to take off in hot pursuit of the attackers. Two days before this attack, naval battles took place in the Gulf. Reports of the sinking of Iranian and Iraqi ships, touched off the closing of Iranian airports to civilian traffic early on 22 September. This precautionary measure on the part of the Iranians could have been misconstrued as preparation for attack. The Iraqi border attacks, however, were more successful.<sup>10</sup>

The Iraqi army launched its offensive from Basra and carried it to Abadan, Khorramshahr, Ahvaz and Dezful. As a result, Basra was subjected to heavy damage from Iranian artillery and bombs. Dezful air base was reported destroyed and Khorramshahr port was said to have received heavy damage.

At the beginning of the conflict, it was felt that if Iraq pressed its offensive on key cities such as Abadan and Khorramshahr, Iran's population would hold the ruling clergy responsible for the impending national humiliation. In the event of a defeat, the army would have borne the burden of this disaster, which would have caused it to be more inclined to listen to appeals for the overthrow of the religious regime.<sup>12</sup> Most of Iran's experienced officers had been



purged by the revolution, there were large numbers of defections, and the lack of spare parts for U.S. made equipment, all pointed to the fact that it did not seem possible for Iran to conduct a full scale war for a long period of time.<sup>13</sup>

The army was never confronted with the predicted defeat since shortly after ringing Abadan, Khoramshahr, Ahvaz, and Dezful for the final decisive push, the Iraqis let up on their drive into Iranian territory. By 26 September they had penetrated 35 miles into Iran. The original Iraqi designs, according to General Khadanfar, were to restore Iraqi sovereignty, and to support this he stated, "We came here to make the Iranian regime come to its senses and then we will withdraw as soon as they respect our sovereignty."<sup>14</sup> The subsequent decline in activity and statements from Baghdad indicating a willingness to discuss peace, were seen as a sign of weakness by Iran, and not as a signal for peace. Hussein appeared reluctant to call for an all-out drive into major western Iranian towns because it would mean heavy casualties and could have possibly tested his mostly Shi'ite troops. Instead of achieving his original plan for a quick, decisive victory, in an attempt to consolidate his power, Hussein had reached a quick impasse.<sup>15</sup>

Iraq offered a four day cease fire on 1 October to begin on 5 October. The Iranians resisted this move in hopes of turning the tide of the war in their favor. Two weeks into the war, neither side was able to boast significant gains on



the ground, while Iran relied heavily on air attacks to prevent Iraqi forces from making further inroads into their territory. The Iranian response to the cease-fire offer came immediately when the government announced its forces were counterattacking near the besieged city of Khorramshahr in an attempt to "slaughter" the bogged down troops. As a result, none of the Iraqi objectives had been achieved by their ground forces as the Iranians made a concerted effort to reinforce Khorramshahr and Dezful. The failure of the Iraqis to mount a major attack against Dezful, located on one of the main roads in Iran, and a key rail and pipeline center to the north, was proof that they had lost their initiative. They began to encounter a strengthening Iranian resistance, particularly from the revolutionary guards who proved to be cagey street fighters in cities such as Khorramshahr where it took 24 days for the Iraqis to clear the city of 2,500-3,000 defenders--mostly guardsmen.

Iraq eventually widened the conflict when it launched its first major air strike against the northern Iranian city of Tabriz, as well as targeting Kermanshah and the Kharg Island oil terminal in the Gulf. This escalation followed limited Iranian successes in pushing back the Iraqi troops from some of the border towns inside Iranian territory. As a result, the Iranian leadership began to prepare their people for a long conflict. Even Khomeini





stated at a Friday prayer service, "This war is not going to end soon," and evidence of this came with the continuation of fierce fighting in Khorramshahr where Iranian rangers were sent in to defend the town. They were specifically trained to defend Iran's sovereign borders and had acquired a poor reputation by assisting the Shah to stay in power. Their actions in the defense of the city gained them the confidence of the new regime and praise of the mullahs. Admitting the role of the armed forces in keeping large areas of Iranian territory, especially Khuzistan, from falling into Iraqi hands caused problems for the ruling clergy who could not allow the army to take all the credit for saving the country. Instead, they were placing an emphasis on the IRGC's role in the conflict.<sup>17</sup>

### C. RESUMPTION OF THE OFFENSIVE

After a stall in the war's progress, Iraq began, once again, to widen the scope of the conflict, this time with a push to Kermanshah, representing the deepest penetration of Iranian territory to date. However, the heaviest fighting was reported around Abadan which underwent persistent Iraqi artillery, fighter-bomber and gunboat bombardment and was regarded as an important strategic objective, since its capture would give the Iraqis complete control not only of the huge oil refinery but also of the Shatt al-Arab, which was one of Baghdad's original war aims.<sup>18</sup> Iraq's Minister



of Defense, General Adnan Khairallah, indicated the Iranians had serious weaknesses in their positions and told of an Iranian brigade which, while trying to break out of Abadan, was encircled by his forces and destroyed. In addition, the provincial capital, Ahwaz, was reportedly overrun by the Iraqis. Allowing for the normal exaggerated rhetoric which has abounded on both sides since the onset of the war, this was an indication that the Iranian attempts to break the Iraqi stranglehold on Khuzistan's major cities had been unsuccessful, due to the superior artillery and tank forces that confronted the defenders. Because the Iraqis thought that the majority of the Iranian ground forces had been drawn to the defense of Abadan, Ahwaz, and Dezful, they stepped up their activities in the north, thinking those defenses were relatively weak. This Iranian attempt at a breakout against superior artillery and tanks was certainly a desperate gamble which prompted some analysts to say that the order must have come from a non-military leader who was unfamiliar with the odds against the Iranians.<sup>19</sup> This is highly likely, since Khomeini became extremely critical of attempts by the clergy to get involved in the conduct of the war, and stated, "I and you and those who are not informed about military matters must not interfere in military affairs." In addition, the attempts at clerical involvement in the running of the war were highly resented by sections of the armed forces.<sup>20</sup> This resentment ran deeper than just



the mullahs attempting to take charge of military matters, as reports began to show the growing rift between the army and the IRGC. The deputy commander of the Iranian forces at Khurramshahr, after being taken prisoner by the Iraqis, stated that guardsmen in the city had placed themselves behind regular army troops and threatened to fire on anyone retreating. This would lend credence to the report that, as the Iraqis tightened their grip around the city, many regular army officers and noncommissioned officers fled Ahwaz.<sup>21</sup> Ayatollah Montazeri addressed this and the problem of coordination among the forces at a Friday prayer ceremony, "... but the responsible authorities and war commanders cannot make firm decisions. Or is it that--God forbid--this is deliberate? All these (issues) should be investigated. The army commander should, in accordance with the Imam's command, act with greater decisiveness and should break the encirclement of Khuninshahr and Abadan and with lightening assault should rid the people of Khuzistan and Kordestan of the evil of the infidel Ba'th agents. But if they are weak and incapable, then they should say so candidly so that the Imam himself would directly make decisions."<sup>22</sup>

#### D. MUHARRAM, 1401 OPERATION

On 14 November 1980, the Iraqis pressed the initiative again on the disorganized, ill-equipped Iranians and captured the town of Susangird, 50 kilometres from Ahwaz.





Command and control within the Iranian forces, which was disjointed at the beginning of the war, seemed to have broken down completely in some areas, in spite of the newly formed Supreme Defense Council. No clear chain of command existed as orders to the regular army followed one chain and orders to the IRGC followed another. The battle of Susangird was to prove to be a testing ground for the newly formed SDC.<sup>23</sup> A radio report on 16 November announced that the reason for the successful Iraqi advance on Susangird was "the lack of artillery support for the combatants in the front line." Military analysts interpreted this to mean criticism by the IRGC of the regular armed forces. A victory by the Iraqis at Susangird would have had a seriously demoralizing effect on the Iranian army, tightened the Iraqi grip on Ahwaz, increased the fundamentalist pressure on Bani-Sadr, and given President Hussein a better bargaining position at the upcoming Arab Summit meeting.<sup>24</sup>

President Bani-Sadr accused the fundamentalists of creating an atmosphere of insecurity in the country and asked them to "stop the political and psychological warfare, at least until after victory." He further blamed the fundamentalist Khuzestan governor, and a leading member of the IRP, Sayed Mohammad Gharazi of "being responsible for the fact that Khuzistan was left defenseless at the beginning of the war" and that "Gharazi did his utmost to destroy the





armed forces." He was also accused of playing a central role in the purge of the upper echelons of the armed forces, thereby leaving troops without knowledgeable and experienced commanders which caused a disintegration of discipline within the ranks.<sup>25</sup>

The battle for Susangird proved to be a testing ground for the fledgling Iranian Supreme Defense Council's and Bani-Sadr's efforts to coordinate the regular army and the IRGC . After touring the war torn southern oil province of Khuzistan, the Iranian President was able to reach an understanding with the revolutionary forces, and as one Air Force Commander stated, "The revolutionary forces now have more faith in us." Representatives of the IRGC and the regular armed forces began meeting regularly each evening to coordinate their efforts enabling them to launch a successful offensive against Susangird. The recapture of the city was a test of the heretofore unchallenged organizational improvements that had been recently implemented. Regular army units were sent as reinforcements to the battlefield, and "it was the army, not the Revolutionary Guards, which forced the Iraqis out of Susangird," a foreign military expert back from the front observed. He added, "This unexpected development has boosted the morale of the armed forces, which are winning points against the Revolutionary Guards."<sup>26</sup> Coordination had improved, but the rivalry between the two forces still existed, although heavily masked in propaganda reports.



The army commander of an artillery battery manned by guardsmen and regular army personnel insisted in an interview with Kayhan International that the guards obeyed army orders to attack. Speaking of the IRGC members of his unit, he said, "They are good fighters. Their life is not important to them. It means nothing."

Under siege for two months, Abadan's defenders were reported to have high morale and the relations between the IRGC and army were said to be "generally good" with "minor differences." The guards were "more disciplined than before, less suspicious towards their military colleagues."<sup>27</sup> The grandson of the Ayatollah (Seyyed Hossein Khomeini) told of the improved order and discipline of the forces in Abadan and Khorramshahr and that the "irregularities" seen in the IRGC had been removed.<sup>28</sup>

The Iraqi invasion of northwest Kurdistan province in mid-December extended the battlefield 550 miles--the full length of the Iran-Iraq border, from the northern tip of the Persian Gulf north to the point where the borders of Iraq, Iran and Turkey meet. This northern push into the Marivan district placed the Iraqi forces within 50 miles of Sanandaj, the second largest city in Kurdistan and site of active insurgents. Three weeks prior to the Iraqi thrust, there was a sharp increase in Kurdish guerrilla activity in Sanandaj and Mehabad. The Iranian government accused Baghdad of arming and financing the rebels in an attempt to aid them



in their struggle for autonomy against the Islamic government. The attack on Kurdistan was a move to put even more military pressure on the fundamentalists to come to the negotiating table and be more amenable to Iraqi terms. Hussein was adamant in rejecting any negotiations that called for an Iraqi withdrawal in Khuzistan, Kurdistan or the western highlands before an "unequivocal Iranian recognition of full, active Iraqi sovereignty over Shatt al-Arab."<sup>29</sup>

#### E. THE LONG AWAITED COUNTEROFFENSIVE

Under pressure from his clerical IRP opponents who were demanding the long-promised counteroffensive against Baghdad, President Bani-Sadr announced its inception in early January 1981. Ayatollah Montazeri, one of his chief detractors, spoke out against the course of the war in a sermon in which he related how many servicemen had complained that their military leaders "would not allow them to advance" against the Iraqis or to voice their opinions on the war.<sup>30</sup>

Segments of 2 or 3 armored divisions, using Chieftain tanks and supported by regular infantry and revolutionary guards, began the main attack from Dezful towards Susangird and Ahwaz. The Iraqis, however, were well prepared, since the Iranians had not bothered to keep their plans secret as they moved troops and supplies towards the Dezful area. The advancing troops were met by MIG fighter-bombers and had little air cover to support their advance. Although the





Iranians immediately claimed great victories, the main Iraqi positions around Ahwaz and Abadan held out. Military analysts discounted boasts by the revolutionary army of destroying 2 Iraqi brigades, killing 500 troops and taking 2,000 prisoners, as being "fanciful."<sup>31</sup> Declaration of an Iranian victory was deemed necessary for a "political cover-up designed for domestic consumption." In fact, it was stated by one analyst that "This week's Iranian military operations can by no stretch of the imagination be described as a counteroffensive."<sup>32</sup>

Just a few days after the counteroffensive was announced, indications appeared that the Iranians were running out of steam and that another stalemate would settle in again. The Iranian Press Agency, Pars, suggested that the Iranian strategy had been simply to "weaken" the Iraqis and that the Iranian forces had reached this objective and fighting was diminishing. However, Bani-Sadr promised that his forces would continue to fight on in spite of "the high price of holding out."<sup>33</sup>

This offensive had few results in terms of the men and material lost. When its first stage ended, Bani-Sadr admitted, "No offensive continues indefinitely." The increased use of the IRGC and mobilization forces brought about a problem of coordination at the front. This was in evidence during a funeral service for over 100 pasdars when the mullah giving the oration asked, "When the order for retreat is issued why are our beloved not told and as a result encircled



and massacred? I warn those responsible, there must be an investigation of this for maybe there are treacherous hands at work." Obviously, tensions between the revolutionary guards and the army remained, both behind the lines as well as at the front.<sup>34</sup>

#### F. PREPARING ANOTHER OFFENSIVE

In spite of the stalemate that settled over the conflict soon after the Iranian January offensive, there were indications that the coming of spring would bring a new, more aggressive Iranian push. One of the first signs of preparation for a renewed offensive was the concentration of two divisions at Dezful, the site of Iran's most important forward air base. In his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Bani-Sadr ordered all of his troops pulled out of Baluchistan province. An Israeli intelligence source reported, "The Iranians are moving a whole armored division from Baluchistan to Khuzistan... Iran is transplanting this division bit by bit, one or two tanks at a time. This operation will have been completed by the spring. Iran has enough time to deploy and do what it wants." In addition, an armored division stationed in the southwest in Kermanshah had been kept from combat in preparation for its use in the spring, while "all Iranian operations on the west front are carried out by paratroopers and special forces." Israeli analysts also reported that Bani-Sadr had plans to flood parts of



Khuzistan when the offensive started. It would be done by opening the floodgates of the Davriresh Dam north of Dezful after the winter snows melted. By doing this, the Iraqi troops would be bogged down and vulnerable to attack by both air force and artillery bombardments.

For several reasons, Iraq's advantage had dwindled over the course of the war, giving Iran another incentive for a spring offensive. The Baghdad government had committed the majority of its 12 divisions to the Gulf war, in addition to 20,000 personnel from its armed civilian groups. Because Iraq is without a regular military reserve, it was believed at this point to have mobilized all of its reservist potential. However, because of the size of the Iranian population, 35 million, the Islamic government still had a large reservist pool from which to draw. The Soviet military embargo had proven to be total and Iraq was unable to conclude any new deals with the West and turned to Jordan and Saudi Arabia to help in the hunt for military hardware. Iraq's stockpiled stores near the Iraqi-Jordanian border, by this time, had been depleted and their air defense system was almost useless with 80 percent of its antiaircraft missiles spent. Finally, the winter in Khuzistan had an adverse affect of the Iraqi soldiers, who found themselves without winter clothing. Officers were reported losing control of their troops "because they don't know how to operate and it happens that Iraqi troops, by mistake shell each other."<sup>35</sup>





In the midst of these rumblings of a new Iranian offensive, came another peace initiative, which, for the first time, was entertained by some Iranian elements. Breaking from the previous Iranian position of refusing to negotiate with the Iraqis as long as they occupied Iranian territory, were General Valiollah Fallahi, Iran's military Commander, and the President, Bani-Sadr. They provided the first public divergence from the official view, indicating that a cease-fire was desirable. The IRP, on the other hand, vowed to continue the fight until Iran won. Officers of the IRGC pledged in a resolution following a 4 day conference, in which peace negotiations were opposed, to continue "until the aggression has been crushed and the Iraqi people have been liberated."<sup>36</sup>

As spring approached, the war had settled into a series of artillery exchanges and Iranian guerrilla raids and was typified by the city of Susangird, twice occupied by the Iraqis. Revolutionary guardsmen occupied the inner city, while elements of the regular army were located outside of it. The Iraqis were faced with having to deal with flushing out the fanatical guardsmen from the city before reaching the regular army. Reported one military expert in Tehran, "In many places, the revolutionary guards serve as a buffer between the respective regular forces... It is quite an effective arrangement, for the Iraqis know they have to kill every man before moving into a place held by guards."<sup>37</sup>





Eight months into the war, the Iraqis were still on the outskirts of Ahwaz, had surrounded Susangird on three sides, were within 10 miles of Dezful, and had still not launched a major offensive to capture any of these cities. Their strategy of bombarding Iranian cities with artillery from a safe distance without mounting a major offensive, kept down their casualties, thus fulfilling a prime political objective and at the same time inflicting heavy losses on Iranians inside the cities. In addition, the Iraqis dominated the eastern and northern approaches to Abadan but had still not crossed the Bahamchir River, a move that would have cut off the remaining Iranian supply line into the city. Their failure to take Abadan in the initial offensive of September 1980, made it impossible for Baghdad to lay claim to total sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab. The cost of a push against Abadan was considered high, since it was defended by a division, 4,000-5,000 guardsmen, and a mechanized brigade.<sup>38</sup>

#### G. THE IRANIAN PUSH

The much touted Iranian spring offensive turned into little more than a propaganda ploy. The Allaho-Akbar Operation, begun on May 21, 1981, was little more than a coordinated effort to seize the heights overlooking the town of Susangird. It was an extension of their earlier battles whose objectives were not major towns but the hills and ridges overlooking them.



Once these objectives were achieved, large scale "victory" claims were made by the government.<sup>39</sup> Termed strategically important by the Iranian press, the Susangird's Allaho-Akbar heights were "liberated" by a combined force of regular army troops, the IRGC, and Dr. Chamran's guerrilla forces. A complete enemy armored battalion and 1 mechanized company were reported destroyed along with boasts of large numbers of Iraqi troops killed or captured.

It was not until September 27, the beginning of the Saminal 'Aimeh Operation, that Iran began to make great gains in its see-saw war with Iraq. It was able to break the year old siege of the refinery city of Abadan and claimed it as Iran's greatest victory thus far in the war, with 1,000 enemy killed and 1,700 captured.<sup>40</sup> The Iranian state radio reported, "The glorious forces of Islam today scored the greatest victory of the past year in fully lifting the siege of Abadan; completely cleansing all areas east of the Karun River from Darkoveyn to Abadan and opening the Abadan-Mahshar and Abadan-Ahwaz roads."<sup>41</sup> The main tactic employed by the Iranians in this successful thrust was to hurl great numbers of guardsmen against the Iraqi positions. The zeal exhibited by the attackers far outmatched that of the Iraqis. In fact, the morale of the Iraqi regular forces was so low that the rate of desertion from the front was seen as "dangerously high."<sup>42</sup>

Speaking of the victory, the Speaker of the Majlis, Hojatolislam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, said, "This



victory could have come sooner, but Bani-Sadr hindered it, for he was relying on pernicious elements in the Army." The Iraqi army was reported as "broken" and the breakout from Abadan was described as an "unprecedented victory for the Army of Islam over the heretical forces of Saddam."<sup>43</sup>

The second major Iranian autumn advance, the "Operation Towards Quds (Jerusalem)" was launched in the area of western Khuzestan province on November 29. It drove a wedge between Iraq's forces in the area north and west of Susangird. In the process of recapturing the border town of Bustan, young Baseej volunteers walked across a minefield from the Sableh river towards the west of Bustan. In this battle it was reported that there were 7 pasdars for every 3 regular Iranian soldiers. The operation continued for 10 days, at which time, the Iranians were able to repel several counterattacks.<sup>44</sup>

The momentum of the Iranian offensive continued with Operation Fajr which began on December 11 in Gilan-e-Gharb, on the western front, with the hope of recapturing the northern town of Qasr-e Shirin. The Iranian publication, Mahjubah, (March/April 1982) boasted that the Iranians had "taken over 90 percent of the occupied lands including Shia Kuh mountain, five kilometres from the frontiers." An example of just how exaggerated Iranian reports had become was evidenced when Mahjubah reported that over 20,900 Iraqi forces were killed, as opposed to a Washington Post (12 December 1981) report of only 1000 Iraqis killed in this operation.





## H. NEW IRANIAN ADVANCES

1982 brought a new year of Iranian successes, both large and small, to boost the armed forces' morale. In the southern region west of Ahwaz, the Daughter of the Prophet Operation followed the pattern of previous Iranian pushes - a small gain, heralded by loud boasts of victory. Reports of hit and run raids by the IRGC became commonplace by this time, as the Iranian papers wrote of guerrilla operations against Iraqi bunkers and artillery.<sup>45</sup>

The Fat'h al-Mobeen Operation, launched on March 22, was an ambitious, well coordinated Iranian attack that was conducted in four stages. The operation was begun rapidly and the Deputy Commander of the 21st Division, Colonel Behruz Suleimaja, in describing the Iranian tactics said, "we made a lot of use of surprise." This enabled the revolutionary forces to recapture some 8,500 square miles of territory in southwest Iran, west of Dezful, along with taking 15,500 prisoners and killing almost 5,000 Iraqi soldiers and nearly destroying the Iraqi Fourth Army. Employing the now familiar tactic of using "forerunners" to clear the path of attack in minefields, the Iranians launched their attack in the early hours of the morning and, in many areas, were able to capture the Iraqi trenches intact. A staff officer said, "We did it with surprise-and God's help."<sup>46</sup> The great victory was owed to the "coordination and versatility between the Army, the IRGC, and the Mobilization forces..."<sup>47</sup> However, shortly



after boasts such as this about the increased cooperation within the military arose, Ayatollah Khomeini, in an Armed Forces Day message, hinted at continuing discord within the military and ordered commanders to purge dissident members from their ranks. He stressed, "Victory may only be achieved with unity. This unity must be safeguarded at all times. If there are elements sowing discord among the military personnel, the commanders must be notified at once."<sup>48</sup>

Pressing their advantage, the Iranians launched another offensive six weeks after the successful Fat'h al-Mobeen Operation at the end of April. The battle stretched from the northern outskirts of Khorramshahr, still held by Iraq, to Hosseineh in the north. Continuing to use the element of surprise, the Iranians attacked at night and positioned themselves on the outskirts of Khorramshahr, enabling their artillery to get within range of Iraq's oil port of Basra.<sup>49</sup> Lending credence to the Iranian victory claims, Iraq pulled back its forces from west of Ahwaz and Susangird in an attempt at reinforcing its units in Khorramshahr.<sup>50</sup> In this "Holy City of Jerusalem" Operation, the Iranians took two key highway cities, Hoveizeh and Hamid. It allowed them to control two-thirds of the Ahwaz-Khorramshahr road link, enabling them to resupply their forces as they approached the city from the north and east. It was also reported that the Iranians were able to penetrate the Iraqi defenses all the



way to the Iran/Iraq border, retaking a 22 mile stretch and effectively cutting the Iraqi forces in half.<sup>51</sup>

Responding to the signal "Ya Mohammad ibn Abdullah!" 65,000 Iranian troops began the mission of recapturing Khorrmashahr in May. With surprising ease, they were able to surround two divisions and two brigades while the remainder of the 12,000 man Iraqi force fled. This lightening victory prompted Iranian leaders to declare they would stop at nothing, indeed, invade Iraq, in order to achieve two objectives: 1) the downfall of Hussein and 2) the collection of war reparations.<sup>52</sup>

On the heels of this victory came yet another drive, on July 13, this one penetrating Iraq itself for the first time in the two year old war. The Seventh Division of the IRGC, utilizing the human wave assault which had come to typify the Corps, spearheaded Operation Ramadan by racing through minefields, over ditches and barbed wire in a head-on thrust against Iraqi positions as night fell.<sup>53</sup> Following them were infantry regulars and reserves, estimated at 80,000, which pressed on to Basra to achieve a "final solution." Iran claimed early victory with the news that they had destroyed two Iraqi divisions and one battalion. This operation came as a culmination of two weeks of a mounting campaign by both military and religious leaders to push into Iraq. The Defense Minister, Colonel Mohammad Salimi, warned, "Despite super-power pressure, a push into Iraqi territory has become





inevitable." The Air Force chief, Colonel Moinpiour, called for an all-out offensive as "the only way" to secure "final victory." The decision to cross the border into Iraq came in direct contradiction to earlier statements which loudly proclaimed that the Iranians had no desire to invade Iraq.<sup>54</sup>

Termed "one of the largest battles since World War II," Operation Ramadan slowed after the initial Iranian thrust which extended 10 miles into Iraqi territory on the southern front. In a pincer movement mounted from the north and south, the Iraqis were able to cut off the advance column. Speaking of the Iranian attack, an Iraqi Colonel said, "They came at us like a human wave. They were running and shouting like hysterical people. Some of them didn't even have guns."<sup>55</sup>

The second anniversary of the Iran/Iraq war found both sides in a quandry. Iraq had lost its gains of September 1980, but Iran had been unsuccessful in its attempts to dislodge Iraqi forces dug in at Basra, thus tempering their earlier victories. To cover this setback, Hashemi Rafsanjani, the Speaker of the Majlis, stated that the Iranian army had advanced only "as much as it had planned." Instead, it has been suggested that the Iranians had suffered a serious setback which could bring about deepening divisions among the political leadership and the army over the real goals of the Operation Ramadan invasion.<sup>56</sup>





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3. Ibid.
4. Christian Science Monitor, 8 April 1980, p. 6.
5. New York Times, 18 September 1980, p. 8.
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47. Tehran Times, 5 April 1982, p. 2.
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52. William E. Smith, "A Holy War's Troublesome Fallout," Time, 7 June 1982, p. 42.
53. "Khomeini's Holy War," Newsweek, 26 July 1982, p. 30.
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## V. CONCLUSION

It seems likely that Iran will win its war against Iraq, eventually. Time, population, and enthusiasm are on the side of the Iranians in this protracted war of attrition. Saddam Hussein completely miscalculated Iran's reaction following the initial Iraqi victories in September 1980. He believed that Iran, weakened by the revolution and torn by internal dissent, would quickly succumb to his more organized forces. The occupation of Iranian territory only strengthened the resolve of Iran's population and became a focal point for national unity.<sup>1</sup> The rebuilding of the purged Iranian military was only hastened as a result of the war with neighboring Iraq. From the ashes of the revolution rose a new army, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, an Islamic ideological army, whose battlefield fervor and maneuvering has surprised Western analysts. The war with Iraq necessitated cooperation between the regular army and the revolutionary guards and it also served to strengthen the Corps itself, from an initial membership of 6,000 to a force of an estimated 120,000 today.<sup>2</sup>

But an eventual Iranian victory will be costly to both sides. Reports have indicated that some of the Iranian army chiefs have expressed anxiety over poorly planned invasion tactics of Iraq. They have felt that too great



an emphasis was placed on the role of the revolutionary guards and the Baseej.<sup>3</sup> In a recent Iranian assault in the Fakah area just inside the Iraqi border, guardsmen constituted the bulk of the Iranian forces with a reported 12 brigades of 2,000 men each, while the regular army was represented by only four brigades.<sup>4</sup> In July 1982, between 16,000 and 20,000 Iranians were reportedly killed after the Iranian command ordered thousands of troops time after time into a narrow triangle of desert northeast of Basra, now termed "the death tunnel."<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, their tactics have served to terrify their Iraqi counterparts, as they charge with no thought of surrender or retreat. However, there are indications that, although they are thrown into battles in suicide assaults, recently, the guardsmen have not been as well armed or as well prepared as in the past. Evidence of this is cited in the enormous losses they have suffered around Iraqi positions.

Once freed of the burden of the war with Iraq, the IRGC will have a free hand to deal with its internal enemies and problems. Although recently, the Islamic Republic has been able to consolidate its position against the MKO inside Iran, resistance leaders outside of the country have begun to come together. The different groups have formed under the title, National Council of Resistance (NCR), whose chairman is the former President of Iran, Abulhassan Bani-Sadr. Organizations represented are the Mujahidin, under Massoud Rajavi, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) led by Abdulrahman Qassemloo,



and the National Democratic Front. In its first meeting in Auvers-sur-Oise, France, the NCR designed a program in the event the Khomeini government falls, whereby a provisional government would rule Iran. With Bani-Sadr as President and Rajavi as Premier, the provisional government would be tasked to organize elections for a constituent and legislative assembly. The provisional government would also be responsible for ending the war with Iraq, freeing all political prisoners, and ending the war in Kurdistan with the subsequent declaration of Kurdish autonomy.

Both Massoud Rajavi and Bani-Sadr contend that "Units of resistance" are in readiness throughout the country to renew their activities at the first sign of an easing of the war situation.<sup>6</sup> It is felt in some circles, however, that Rajavi's Paris based organization might end up hurting his cause. Said Rouhallah K. Ramazani of the University of Virginia, "One can't sit in Paris and run a counterrevolution." There is also speculation as to whether or not the Mujahidin has a large enough base of popular support to enable it to eventually take over the government. It has been said of the MKO, "they can obviously disrupt and terrorize, but whether they have an alternative program and leadership is far from clear."<sup>7</sup>

Shrouded in their historical past with an undeniable emphasis on religion, the IRGC epitomizes the concept of the "ideological army." Armed with a fanatical faith which





glorifies martyrdom, young guardsmen have shown an incredible eagerness to prove their faith on the battlefield, a desire few Westerners can understand or appreciate. However, their fervor is not confined to the warfronts. In accordance with the IRGC constitution, the guardsmen are seeing to the exportation of the Islamic Revolution in units such as the Golan Battalion, whose job it is to orchestrate the liberation of Jerusalem. Recently, the IRGC established a headquarters, hospital and a sports center in Baalbek, after entering Lebanon through Syria following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon on 6 June 1982. On the eve of the Lebanese independence day celebration, between 300 to 500 revolutionary guardsmen stormed the main government building in Baalbek, thus demonstrating the extent to which the influence of the Iranian Revolution has grown throughout the Arab world and the active role that the IRGC has taken in its exportation.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps this is an attempt by the Iranian government to channel the energies and frustrations of their youth outward, away from the failures of the Islamic Revolution.

Iran is in need of a Thermidor—a period of transition from the brutalities of the Revolution to tranquility. It was during such a period following the French Revolution that Napoleon emerged as a leader, as did Cromwell after the British Civil War.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps an Iranian Thermidor will allow the emergence of a military figure, one imbued with





the necessary religious principles of Islam to uphold the ideals of the Revolution, but schooled in military matters as well. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps offers a blending of religion and the military, a combination which may allow this organization to capture the support of the population following the Ayatollah's death.



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7. Henry Mueller, "A Government Beheaded," Time, 14 September 1981, p. 40.
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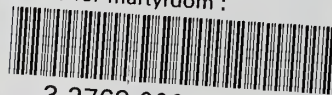
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